ECOLOGIES WITHOUT BORDERS?

Remapping & Remaking Conservation in the Okavango-Zambezi Basin

Undergraduate Research Thesis

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

"Oh, you're the visiting student from America?"

It was July, 2016. I was in Botswana, at the headquarters of the Secretariat of the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (a mouthful and a half; henceforth, KAZA TFCA), and I had apparently made myself known.

Yes, I was a visitor and a student. A visitor to the basins of the Okavango and Zambezi rivers in the southern African interior, to the sovereign nation-states of Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. A visitor to offices, to farms, to sites of World Heritage, to habitats, and to homes. A student of the KAZA TFCA that those nations had established—along with Angola, a country I did not visit—and of the many relationships such an institution requires, affects, effects, and constrains. A student of history and of geography, trained to study patterns and processes across time and space. A student of multiple modes and methods of social analysis, from close reading against the grain to ethnography in its multicultural and multispecies varieties. A student of postcolonial and feminist critiques of knowledge-production, attentive to my own complex and shifting positions within the social landscapes of the Okavango-Zambezi basin.

I was a visitor and a student, and I faced the challenges, responsibilities, and opportunities those designations afforded during three months of fieldwork for this honors thesis.

How I got myself to the headquarters of the KAZA Secretariat—the institutional epicenter of the phenomena I came to study—is rather representative of my entire field experience. "Snowball sampling," I had explained in grant proposals and Institutional Review Board applications, would help me make all the connections I could need, expanding outward from my first contacts at the Anglo-Zimbabwean NGO dedicated to lion conservation that I had previously arranged to stay with at their offices in Livingstone, Zambia and in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. (I spent June and July in each town, after traveling from Cape Town, South Africa through Namibia and through Botswana's Okavango Delta to the Victoria Falls in May, all the while ethnographically immersed in the belly of the southern African tourist beast. At the end of July, before returning to America, I took a last-minute three-day trip to Kasane, Botswana to interview people at the Secretariat.) Snowballing, however, seems a metaphor both inappropriate for southern Africa and entirely inaccurate for the actual process. Instead, my efforts to create a research network were more in the style of the jackal, small mammals that I saw prowling around various national parks' tourist campgrounds in the evening twilight and otherwise sensed but could hardly see in the darkest of nights. Like jackals scavenging for morsels of leftover food, I was persistent, slightly sneaky, relatively harmless, finding and taking whatever I could in opportunities (carrion?) for making contacts and asking questions.

Jackal near (artificial) watering hole in Etosha National Park, Namibia—May, 2016

My inquiry into KAZA grew lean over the first days and then first weeks in Zambia, faced with repeated promises I would soon—soon!—meet the NGO's government liaison consultant, a man reputed to be on friendly relations with nearly every southern Zambian bureaucrat, businessperson, and traditional chief. Meanwhile I did what I could, settling into the everyday work of NGO-style biodiversity conservation and interviewing whomever I could, even if they had never heard of "transfrontier conservation"—the majority had not. In these early days, to get a sense of who lived in this part of southern Zambia and how, I interviewed two head teachers at rural elementary schools where this NGO runs literacy programs in partnership with a British university. I interviewed some of the NGO's Zambian staff, a forester with decades of experience in the lumber industry, a brilliant young biologist not long out of university, and a driver with an infinite smile, mentioned to me by another employee as someone good to interview because he used to be a poacher. Though I was hesitant to ask him about that part of his past, he was un-shy, volunteering the stories. I eventually worked up the nerve to interview the NGO's director, a Brit with a brooding demeanor and a harsh sense of humor (he called KAZA a "******* marketing scheme"), who lived alone in a house in the national park. Alone save for his overweight black dachshund, a friendly fellow unafraid of the baboons that daily intruded the open-air office complex, the elephants kept at the neighboring elephant-ride attraction, and the lions enlisted in the NGO's semi-*ex situ* "re-wilding" project.[1] (Who and what, really, is "wild" in all these entangled multispecies webs?)

[1] More on that in another thesis. In any case, Irus Braverman (2015) already wrote the book on it.

Finally 'soon' came, and I met the consultant of renown. The ethnographic jackal in me pounced, and by the afternoon I was in the Livingstone office of a Zambian conservation planning officer. For the next few weeks, I spent my days in town, rather than in the national park a 15-minute drive away, dividing the hours between the archives of the Livingstone Museum (once a world famous research center connected to a who's who of mid-century anthropologists), the office building across the parking lot that housed the conservation planner as well as the tourism ministry and agency branches (revealing?), and the café down the street, a human watering hole with one of the few strong wifi networks around and the best Hawaiian pizza in southern Africa. At the multi-purpose government office, especially, I was jackal-like, coming by—at first randomly, then repeatedly—to ask if Ms. What's-her-name or Mr. So-and-so were in. I was more skittish than bold, not wanting to draw unnecessary attention and leaving at the slightest sense of annoyance, as I had a deep sense of respect for the work everyone did and was consciously careful not to be a bother. If someone casually said for me to come back another time, however, I would be back the next day and the day after that until they would sit down with me. Still, few of them had any direct or concrete experience with KAZA and commonly told me they were not the ones to ask.

It was through these and other hangings-around, though, that I heard about a planning meeting for a KAZA-supported community conservancy. A warm, funny, no-nonsense government forester I had first met while conducting a tree-counting survey (jointly with the NGO) in a scraggly patch of land mentioned the meeting to me as if she expected I was already going. When I told her I didn't know what she was referring to, she made a call to the Zambian KAZA liaison who had been plainly skeptical of me the previous time we had shaken hands. I don't know what she said—much of their conversation was in Chitonga, I presumed—but she got him to provisionally agree to my attendance. Two days later I was up first thing in the morning, dressed in my best clothes and calling the friendliest taxi man preferred by all the foreigners at the NGO to drive me to the hotel where the meeting would be held. (The Oriental Something-or-other Hotel, owned and operated by overseas Chinese.) I arrived before anyone else, and when the skeptical liaison's SUV pulled into the hotel's lot, I finally got him to agree to my being a silent observer—but only at the first of the two days, the more public half, where various 'stakeholders' could voice their perspectives on the potential conservancy's prospects.

I picked a seat in the back and sat quietly as others gradually arrived: a group of white South African and Zimbabwean nationals from the Peace Parks Foundation (more on them to come), who would be facilitating the meeting; community leaders at various rungs of leadership in the two traditional authorities on whose land the conservancy would be formed (more on them to come); bureaucrats from the departments of Fisheries, Parks & Wildlife, and Forestry, including my friend, who sat to my left. Last but most of all, a senior chief from one of the two traditional authorities arrived to great ceremony, everyone kneeling and clapping. Tall, trim, and sophisticated, wearing a black beret, tan jacket, and a Rolex-like watch, His Royal Highness the senior chief reminded me most of a retired jazz musician, effortlessly content in fame and fortune. To my right, two chairs away, sat the only other person who appeared to be under 35 years of age; I was a baby-faced 20.

We barely got to talking shortly before the meeting began, but when everyone stated their name and position—here I first identified myself as a "visiting student"—I heard that he was an intern for KAZA, attending this planning meeting with the Secretariat's second-in-command. Alike in youth and passion for conservation, we became fast friends, on and off Facebook, and he encouraged me to come visit the Secretariat in Kasane and introduced me to his colleagues when I eventually did.

(I should mention, too, that after the lunch break—a buffet of *nshima*, grilled chicken, and assorted vegetables served in the hotel's dining room—I was called over for a rare, private conversation with His Royal Highness the senior chief; perhaps I stuck out as somewhat curious to him. I have forgotten much of our exchange, except my feeling of deference, but he was evidently interested in what I had to say. He asked if I was returning for the second day; I said I had been invited for only the first; he replied that that was nonsense, I must come. So I did.)

If I were like a jackal, my research had led me into the company of creatures much larger and more powerful than myself. I invoke jackals for their wily spirit and scavenging prowess amid impressive challenges and hope they would not mind being compared to me, a human student of considerably duller wits attempting to conduct ethnographic research under considerably easier circumstances. The ethical questions of pursuing social scientific research across cultural, species, and other lines (however tenuous) are great and of great interest to me. I have thought, overthought, unthought, and rethought these questions since the start of this project two and a half years ago. But I now rest as easily at night as I hope jackals do during the day knowing I did and am doing my best to be a responsible visitor, student, and researcher. Still, "responsibility," I have learned from Jacques Derrida via Donna Haraway, "is excessive, or it is not a responsibility."[2]

I have introduced the 'how' of my research from the start because, in ways obvious and imperceptible, the 'how' made and remade the 'what,' 'where,' and 'why.' My network of research companions, interlocutors, and fellow travelers—human and not—constrained and made possible the questions I could ask, the thoughts I could think, and the political ecology I could practice.

In this honors thesis, I offer a historical and geographical account of conservation practices in the place that could be called the Okavango-Zambezi basin. Considering politics ecologically and ecologies politically, I map the relations among humans, animals, plants, and the non-living matter that sustains them and the contestations and collaborations these relations sustain.

POLITICAL? ECOLOGY?

In the field of political ecology, what are politics or the political?

When I was beginning to develop and design this thesis research, I would have answered this question quite differently than I will now. This project began under the title *The New Frontier: Postcolonial Nationhood & Transnational Conservation in the Okavango-Zambezi Basin* and featured an idea of politics centered on institutions and, especially, the nation-state.

[2] Derrida 1991; Haraway 2008.

> I propose to determine the origins and analyze the operations of the KAZA TFCA in addition to the effects of such a designation on the actions of national, multinational, sub-national, and non-national (i.e., NGOs) actors within the TFCA boundaries. My proposed ethnographic research on the presumed asymmetrical interactions of diverse actors in the transnational conservation sphere is primarily aimed to study the tensions, or lack thereof, between conservation, development, and governance ideologies operating within the TFCA ethos and the physical TFCA landscape. (Grant proposal, February 15, 2016)

As fieldwork is wont to do, perhaps especially the first time, my research experience in southern Africa challenged my conceptual frame. I never got a sense of how conservation practice differed in Zambia versus Zimbabwe versus Botswana as a function of national character, context, circumstance, or policy. I did, however, get a sense of how complicated and particular governance, at any point on the (more ideal than actual) local-global scale, most always is. For instance, one natural heritage official in a Zambian government agency—a subscriber to print copies of the journal *Cultural Anthropology* and a particular admirer of the work of political scientist Benedict Anderson—told me that he appreciated how the UNESCO's World Heritage standards for managing the Victoria Falls (a paradigmatic form of "supranational" intervention) strengthens his own hand in dealings within and beyond the national government. Moreover, I saw clear divergences between official policies to discipline and punish the charcoal burners—who were repeatedly blamed by many different conservationists for much of southern Zambia's 'forest degradation' or even 'deforestation'—and the actual practice of the forestry officials tasked with disciplining and punishing, apparently more lax and sympathetic than the laws on the books.

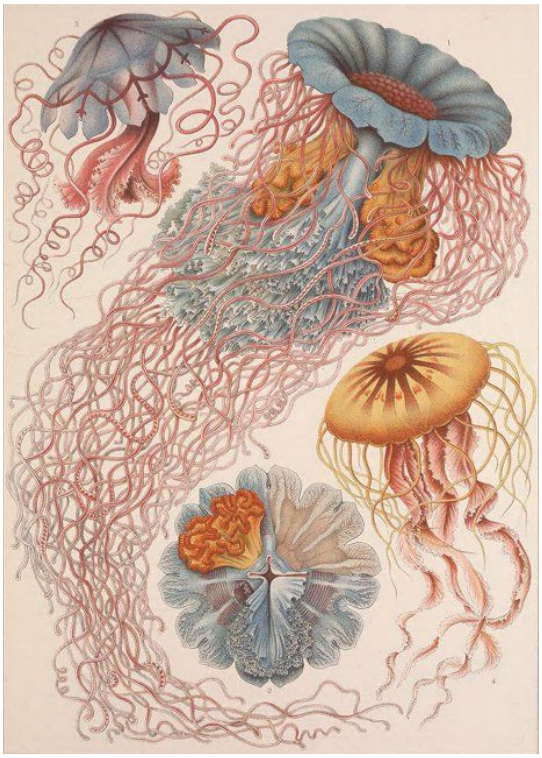
My experience in the field made me question the questions I had come with. Politics had to mean something more than the dealings within, between, and among governments and other official actors, such as NGOs or 'local communities.' I needed a sense of the political attuned to the unofficial contestations, negotiations, and collaborations that I came to recognize as ubiquitous in all social relations—and needed a sense of the social, and the political, not confined to only humans.

The "political" in the field of political ecology is frequently, if not always, attuned to this kind of expansive web of social relations. I only realized the fact and the value of this dimension of political ecology upon my return from southern Africa and the resumption of my social scientific training, particularly in two strains of ("post-structuralist") thought personified by Michel Foucault and Bruno Latour.[3] While quite different, both approach politics as something like what Foucault once called a "productive network….at once continuous, uninterrupted, adapted and 'individualised' throughout the entire social body."[4] (I am not sure if 'the social body' is still a workable metaphor for multispecies relations, but at any rate, following Donna Haraway, my current conception of a

[3] From the start of this project, I worried about the colonialist implications of using the KAZA TFCA as an experimental test for European social theory, but I am personally satisfied that I have avoided the motives and means of that unsavory (violent?) pattern of behavior.

[4] Foucault 1980: 119.

social body looks less like my own Vitruvian *Homo sapiens* form and more like a messy, entangled web of tentacular critters à la German biologist Ernst Haeckel's jellyfish prints.[5]) Power and politics, they both teach, are everywhere, at every when, between everyone and everything.



Ernst Haeckel, "Discomedusae," *Kunstformen der Natur* (1904)

Michel Foucault proposed a view of power relations in which the analytic focus is not on top-down interdicts by rulers of the state but on the everyday and everywhere efforts, or "tactics," to "arrange things in such a way that, through a certain number of means, such-and-such ends may be achieved."[6] Foucault was thus more interested in "régimes of practice," the mundane and the "taken-for-granted" ways that people (but perhaps not only human "people") continuously conduct themselves, than in official policies or monumental events.[7] Political governance, in these terms, concerns not simply control over territory:

> but, rather, a sort of complex composed of men and things. The things, in this sense, with which government is to be concerned are in fact men, but men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those things that are wealth, resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility, and so on; men in their relation to those other things that are customs,

[5] Haraway 2016.
[6] Foucault 2000: 211.
[7] Ibid.: 225.

> habits, ways of acting and thinking, and so on; and finally men in their relation to those still other things that might be accidents and misfortunes such as famine, epidemics, death, and so on.[8]

The most influential ideas Foucault contributed to the analysis of governance were his interlocking notions of disciplinary power and biopower. Per Foucault, disciplinary power works toward determining individuals' behavior by, most of all, determining the options of behaviors individuals believe, think, or even 'know' are possible.[9] In this way, power disciplines knowledge and conduct, though this model surely needs further reformulation in multispecies contexts.[10] Biopower, on the other hand, concerns the management of populations, not individuals, and is centered on the power to "make live and let die," unlike different (and, per Foucault, historically earlier) forms of governance committed to 'make die and let live.'[11]

Foucault's ideas have long been enthusiastically taken up in the study of conservation. In its co-constitution with the sciences of ecology, conservation biology, and other related disciplines, the practice of conservation often functions, per Stephanie Rutherford, "as a power/knowledge regime, producing the truth about nature, the way it can be told, and by whom."[12] These scientific regimes govern—however unevenly—the conduct of producers, consumers, and subjects of knowledge. Moreover, in its common concern for biodiversity against the threat of extinction, conservation practice depends on the taxonomic designation of species, the privileging of (continuously measured) populations over individuals, and continuous calculations of who should be made to live and who should be let die.[13] These conceptions of power and governance have radically reshaped my own understandings of politics and have inspired my thinking across the entirety of this thesis, even where I may not explicitly or even consciously identify the Foucauldian dimensions of my arguments.[14]

In recent decades, Bruno Latour has been one of few theorists with ideas as widely ranging and as wildly influential as Michel Foucault's. While I have spent less time and energy reading Latour, his contributions to and popularization of "actor-network theory" have been inescapable, practically entrapping me in their conceptual tentacles.[15] That would seem to be precisely the point,

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[8] Foucault 2001: 93.

[9] Foucault 1995, 2000: 331-334. Foucauldian geographer D. Asher Ghertner (2010: 186) has additionally suggested that governance "functions by constructing and making intelligible categories of knowledge that were previously unintelligible and authorizing those categories through expert 'truths.'" This idea is especially influential in poststructuralist critiques of 'Western' *scientific* epistemologies.

[10] Important contributions to the rethinking of multispecies discipline include: Pemberton 2004; Haraway 2008; Youatt 2008; Rutherford 2011.

[11] Foucault 2003; Biermann & Mansfield 2014.

[12] Rutherford 2007: 298.

[13] Foucault 1990; Youatt 2008; Biermann & Mansfield 2014; Lorimer 2015.

[14] Alas, I may have been disciplined and have disciplined myself into a Foucauldian thinker beyond recognition.

[15] Even Wikipedia makes clear that Latour is only one of many (including Michel Callon, John Law, and Annemarie Mol) to develop ANT, but I will use him as a stand-in for this broader collection anyway.

for as Latour has suggested, "there is nothing but networks, there is nothing in between them."[16] Originating in the social study of science and technology, actor-network theory aims to reformulate what constitutes the social and who and what constitute social actors (or 'actants'), although I offer my own partial reformulation of these questions in chapter 4.[17] Latour's attention to multiple forms of agency and to the "heterogeneity," the intricacy, and the ubiquity of relations—material and semiotic—has been especially instructive, and his influence on the contemporary study of conservation is vast.[18]

I do not want to suggest I am now or have ever been an expert in French poststructuralist thought—I do not aim to be. Neither do I want to suggest that this honors thesis is something like a case study for these theories—I do not aim for it to be. These theorists' names will not frequently appear in the chapters to come, but I felt it worthwhile and necessary to elaborate how these concepts have expanded my ideas of the political, without which my arguments would be quite different, as would an entire wave of political-ecological scholarship. Indeed, how this political ecology differs from earlier geographical, anthropological, and broadly social-scientific conceptions of human-environment relations is illustrative. Until relatively recently, the cultural ecological approach of anthropologist Steve Lansing's widely popular *Priests and Programmers*, for instance, could conceive of something like "'traditional'" water management schemes in Bali "as autonomous systems potentially free of entanglements in larger political and economic processes—and perhaps even free of internal conflict," as Stefan Helmreich observed in a robust critique of Lansing's work.[19] Today's political ecology in its poststructuralist modes aims not to reduce human-environment relations to some presumed essential, ordered simplicity but instead to accept and appreciate the sprawling, messy proliferation of worldly complexity—wholly entangled and riddled with conflict. That, at least, is the political in my political ecology.

Yet, what is ecology—or, rather, what are ecologies?

Inspired by an exciting strand of recent interdisciplinary scholarship, I theorize ecology along the lines of what Tim Choy has called an "emergent web of relationships among constitutive and constituting parts" of a larger socio-natural system, across borders between organisms, communities, nations, species.[20] Here I refer not only to the scientific discipline that originated in and spread from Europe—though I do map that discipline's political history in the Zambezi basin in the following chapter. Instead I follow Tim Ingold, whose efforts "to replace the stale dichotomy of nature and culture" have generated an ecology and ecologies "very different from the kind that has become familiar to us from scientific textbooks."[21] More importantly, I refer to the world(s) in which multiple ways of living, thinking, perceiving, knowing, acting, experiencing, and engaging are

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[16] Latour 1996: 370. As a student, it sometimes feels there is nothing but actor-network theory….except, perhaps, Foucauldian theory!
[17] Latour 2005.
[18] Latour 1996: 380. E.g. Zink 2013; van der Duim et al. 2014; Lorimer 2015; Tsing 2015.
[19] Lansing 2007 [1991]; Helmreich 1999: 252-3.
[20] Choy 2011: 11.
[21] Ingold 2000: 16.

situated. "Making worlds is not limited to humans," Anna Tsing suggests; "in fact, all organisms make ecological living places, altering earth, air, and water"—and altering other organisms, I should add.[22] These are the more-than-human (but far from non-human) ecologies that I live, think, and engage with, as much in Ohio today as I did in the Okavango-Zambezi basin two years ago.

Author, on boat, with research subjects in the Chobe River—May, 2016

THINGS TO COME

Conservation is not only a matter of species and spaces; no matter how it is practiced, conservation is also a historical process, which is to say it engenders particular relations to past, present, and future.[23] In that spirit, this honors thesis will take multiple approaches to the study of conservation. I will investigate historical and contemporary forms of conservation in the Okavango and Zambezi river basin region of inland southern Africa, analyzing in particular the political-ecological relationships entangled in and occasioned by the establishment of the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA), an environmental management collaboration between the nations of Angola, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. How has conservation been mapped and made as a historical-geographic phenomenon in the region, and how are KAZA and other contemporary institutions and practices remapping and remaking both conservation and that being conserved?[24] How, too, have conservation efforts—especially but not

[22] Tsing 2015: 22. I have also been strongly influenced by Eduardo Kohn's (2013) "anthropology beyond the human" and "ecology of selves."

[23] I remember feeling radically inspired upon encountering Mikhail Bakhtin's (1982) notion of the "chronotope" in my study of literature and folklore, and the idea pervades my historical-geographical thinking, even as I have to leave it untheorized here—although it has often been taken up in geography before (e.g., Folch-Serra 1990).

[24] As a student of a certain style of geography (e.g. Jackson 1989), I know mapping is not now and has never been a mere representational rendering of space in two or three dimensions. In this thesis, I approach mapping as a social-spatial process that I can study as well as an analytical tool I can use to study social/political/ecological relations in space and time.

exclusively KAZA—remapped and remade the nation-states of the Okavango-Zambezi basin? This thesis does not question whether conservation, in its many modes of practice, is good or bad—whatever those mean—but rather how it works and for whom?

I begin in the following chapter by mapping an *unnatural* history of conservation situated on both banks of the upper Zambezi River, attending to the ways 19th-century British imperialists visiting the region perceived and eventually claimed these territories (did they also consider themselves responsible visitors?), to the emergence of colonial states and the ensuing restructuring of Zambezi peoples' political and ecological relationships, and to the formation and reformation of various conservation ideologies, institutions, and practices beyond the end of colonial occupation. (I note, without quite knowing what to make of the observation, that colonization and decolonization did not seem to be useful periodizations for most people I discussed history with across southern Africa. Independence, instead, was the preferred reference point.) Next, in the third chapter, I turn to the contemporary "transfrontier conservation area" model, historicizing it within the regional context of southern Africa and within the global political economy. Unlike most influential accounts of transfrontier conservation, however, I challenge the assumption that the economic doctrine of neoliberalism is the primary force in operation. Situating my arguments in the particular ecologies of the Okavango-Zambezi basin, I emphasize not only the multinational but especially the multispecies dimensions of the KAZA TFCA. With this, in the fourth chapter, I position elephants as key political-ecological actors and further interrogate examine whether and how elephants are forcing new practical articulations and theoretical conceptions of sovereignty. At last, I offer a brief conclusion as a fifth and final chapter, opening questions to which there may be no answers: can there be political ecologies—thinking disciplines or living spaces—without borders?

2. UNNATURAL HISTORY

Rethinking Colonization & Conservation in the Zambezi Basin

> The central assumption that guides what follows is that the peculiar "historicity" of African societies, their own raisons d'être and their relation to solely themselves, are rooted in a multiplicity of times, trajectories, and rationalities that, although particular and sometimes local, cannot be conceptualized outside a world that is, so to speak, globalized.[25]
>
> — Achille Mbembe

> "Africa" — vague or composite — cannot hope to match the complexity or interest of any actual place in Africa….I want to be particular about being particular about what we are talking about when we talk about Africa.[26]
>
> — Teju Cole

The river basins of the southern African interior are fertile ground for history. This is only one history out of many that could be told in and of the lands along the Zambezi river: a history of humans in ecological relations with animals, plants, and non-living matter—a nonhuman realm sometimes called 'nature'; of the nations that today claim territory on each side of the river, Zambia and Zimbabwe; and of ideas 'nature' and 'nation' that attempts to render both unnatural.[27]

The peoples of the Zambezi basin had developed material and meaningful relations with the landscape they inhabited and with its other living beings long before the time of European arrival. Whether hunter-gatherers, pastoralists, or agriculturalists, Zambezian peoples primarily engaged in subsistence lifestyles and were reliant on these relational ecologies to sustain themselves and their lifeways. Though transience and mobility, within and between generations, were key characteristics of many pre-colonial African societies—necessary "when resources came under pressure," James Murombedzi notes—some groups developed religious "cults….profoundly ecological in function," or in other words, deeply concerned with the more-than-human relations that sustained their lifeworld.[28] Among the functions of these cults were powers to "regulate the production and distribution of food, the protection of natural resources, and the control of human migratory movements," intertwining material and spiritual realms.[29] For one, the figure of Nyaminyami, a snake-like river god of the Tonga people who populate both banks of the Zambezi, has sometimes served to "symboli[ze] the will of African Nature" for the Tonga, per anthropologist David M.

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[25] Mbembe 2001: 9.
[26] Cole 2018.
[27] See also Raymond Williams' (1985 [1976]) canonical unraveling of the uniquely knotty idea of 'nature.' Following Mahmood Mamdani (1996: 229), too, I aim here "to problematize both sides of every dualism by historicizing it, thereby underlining the institutional and political condition for its reproduction and for its transformation."
[28] Murombedzi 2003: 21-22.
[29] Ibid.: 22.

Hughes.[30] (Today, Nyaminyami necklaces are abundant in tourist shops, stalls, and sidewalk sales on each side of the river.) To consider these types of connections as conservation—a relationship between humans, other living beings, and life-sustaining matter committed to the dynamic perpetuation of this ecology—is a bit unnatural but, I think, necessary.[31]

Before colonization, Zambezian societies were marked by low population densities (often low populations) and non-intensive consumption patterns, certainly compared to those in early-industrial Europe—not as a natural fact of pre-colonial Africa in general but as a result of the particularly-situated political and environmental histories of the Zambezi basin, which exceed my limited purview here.[32] The arrival of European colonizers, however, began to fundamentally alter these relations, and it is there that I will start this story.

What was colonization in southern Africa? Surely no one answer can suffice, but here I will consider how colonization involved the claiming the power to govern territory, the environment, and the peoples—and other living beings—who already occupied the land, as has happened elsewhere around the world.[33] Indeed, as the late Eric Hobsbawm once summarized, "Between 1876 and 1915 about one-quarter of the globe's land surface was distributed or redistributed as colonies among a half-dozen states. Britain increased its territories by some 4 million miles, France by some 3.5 millions."[34] Much of Britain's imperial acquisitions were in southern Africa; almost 450,000 square miles in present-day Zambia and Zimbabwe alone. In the upper Zambezi basin, as elsewhere, the "environment" was not only the physical terrain on which colonial relations were enacted, contested, reproduced, and resisted but often the explicit object through which these relations were made and remade—and, indeed, mapped and remapped."[35]

Through a century-long sequence of accretions of British power over the landscape of the African interior, colonization facilitated and sometimes necessitated ever more invasive interventions into the relationships between the native peoples of the Zambezi basin and the ecologies they lived within. Often these power grabs marked an attempt at conservation, a polysemic ethos that has dominated environmental policies and practices in Africa for much of the last century. Encompassing efforts on a continuum from completely obviating human presence from the

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[30] Hughes 2006.

[31] Cf. Schumaker 2001: 327. If conservation, per Flora Lu (2005: 204), "is a set of social understandings and behavioral patterns that can emerge when there is an agreement by a group of people to temper their resource use in the expectation that others will do the same," it is possible to read conservation into the pre-colonial African archive. Indeed, a view I have frequently seen expressed online by indigenous and Third World thinkers holds that the endangerment and extinction of nonhuman species only began or at least intensified after the arrival of European colonizers, which I mention not for the factual accuracy of the view—correlation, we know, does not automatically suggest causation—but for its political thrust. It is unnatural but, I think, necessary to write history from an anticolonial view, even while avoiding romanticizing any intrinsic ecological beneficence or noble savagery of pre-colonial African peoples. The alternative is not objectivity but instead tacit approval of the colonially-produced status quo.

[32] Musambachime 1992; Murombedzi 2013.

[33] Recall, especially, Michel Foucault's (2001: 93) concetion of governance. See also Donald S. Moore's (2005: xi) "critical genealogy of modes of power that produced landscapes of dispossession still haunting Zimbabwe."

[34] Hobsbawm 1987: 59.

[35] Maano Ramutsindela's (2014) edited collection on the constructed nature of borders is instructive here, too.

non-human, 'natural' environment to making human use of the natural environment more productive and sustainable, conservation has a history replete with contradictions and complexities.[36]

In the lands surrounding the Zambezi river, understandings of and relations to African landscapes and environments wrought by early British explorers including David Livingstone and Frederick Selous helped shape the formation of the North and South Rhodesia colonies and reshape modes of governance therein. These newly-developed colonial states increasingly consolidated their power through environmental management regimes that regulated and restricted African authority over and access to land and nature. Bill Adams has argued that "The acquisition of colonies was accompanied by, and to a large extent enabled by, a profound belief in the possibility of restructuring nature and re-ordering it to serve human needs and desires," but it is important to note whose human needs and desires were privileged (exclusively, or nearly so): those of the colonizers, not the colonized.[37]

What follows is an effort to map some of the histories of colonial and conservationist modes of governance in the Zambezi basin.

NAMING, TAMING, CLAIMING

A trio of pioneering Brits—Christian missionary David Livingstone, aristocratic hunter Frederick Selous, and imperial magnate Cecil Rhodes—each in his own way contributed to the making of colonization and remaking of conservation on the Zambezi frontier through successive assertions of power over the African landscape.[38]

Scotsman David Livingstone, as the first notable European figure to traverse the south-central African landscape, helped construct particular notions of the land and environments of the Zambezian basin and of the peoples who lived there that would prove influential in the formation of colonial political and environmental regimes. In Africa to spread the teachings of Christianity to the supposedly heathen souls—with one eye to the heavens and the other to establishing British trade infrastructure in the region—Livingstone also spread an idea of African 'nature' to his white Christian brethren back in Europe and America. Through his writings, Livingstone popularized a notion that the Zambezi River was "'God's highway' to the interior" of

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[36] I use "conservation" to stand for a wide variety of activities that are in general invested in maintaining or rehabilitating landscapes and/or ecosystems to a certain historical (or imagined) standard. Since the late 19th century, an ethos inspired by the seminal work and writing of John Muir was often termed "preservationism," but I suggest such ideas have been subsumed in recent decades by the umbrella term "conservationism." Worthington (1983: 139), however, offers a helpful distinction between the two modes in their original senses: "Conservation, especially of renewable resources, was dynamic and constructive;...preservation was static."

[37] Adams 2003: 23.

[38] Similar connections between colonization and conservation occurred elsewhere in the world at this time though under different imperial and on-the-ground regimes and for historically and geographically unique purposes and agendas. See, for example, Richard Grove's (1995) classic study of the development of French colonial conservation ideas and practice in Mauritius and other tropical island "Edens", and Kalyanakrishnan Sivaramakrishnan's (1999) study of British colonial forestry management in eastern India.

the continent, an image that would inspire countless other brave white men to venture into the depths of Africa for God, gold, or glory.[39] Indeed, Livingstone's celebrity can be partly credited for the ensuing European imperial scramble for territory in the African interior.[40] One way in which Livingstone made south-central Africa for the first time accessible to further European explorers was through the act of naming (or, rather, re-naming), symbolically inscribing British power onto the Zambezian landscape.

Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa, Livingstone's immensely popular 1857 journal-memoir of his explorations in inner Africa, suggests the contours of prima facie British understandings of the African natural (as well as social) landscapes. One lasting legacy of Livingstone's expedition was his purported "discovery" of Victoria Falls, among other less noteworthy natural wonders of Africa, described in detail in *Missionary Travels*.[41] Though historian JoAnn McGregor points out that Livingstone's most egregiously romanticized depictions of the landscape—e.g., "[Victoria Falls] had never been seen before by European eyes; but scenes so lovely must have been gazed upon by angels in their flight," a quote now ubiquitous in promotional materials for any touristic activity related to the falls—were added at the behest of his London publisher, elsewhere Livingstone relates something more subtle: the act of naming.[42]

> Being persuaded that Mr. Oswell and myself were the very first Europeans who ever visited the Zambesi in the centre of the country, and that this is the connecting link between the known and unknown portions of that river, I decided to use the same liberty as the Makololo did, and gave the only English name I have affixed to any part of the country.[43]

The falls' beauty is here left only implicit in Livingstone's text, but its perceived sublimity is suggested nonetheless by its uniqueness in receiving, and perhaps calling for, an English name. Crucial, too, is Livingstone's reference to the Makololo—the nation with whom he most closely associated on his travels and who served largely as his "interlocutors" in south-central Africa—who were themselves recent arrivals to the Zambezi basin and had called the falls "Mosioatunya" (or "the smoke that thunders"). However, the Leya people, who had long inhabited the area until the Makololo's more recent occupation, called the falls "Syuungwe na mutitima," translated as "the heavy mist that resounds" or "the place of rainbows."[44] By remarking on the Makololo's act of

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[39] McGregor 2009: 47. Livingstone had yet another eye to ending the "Arab" slave trade, a proto-humanitarian mission that relied on and reified European stereotypes of Arab and African peoples to legitimate imperial rule—conquest through (supposed) liberation.

[40] Hochschild 1998.

[41] To date, the town on the Zambian side of the Falls bears his name as a tribute.

[42] Livingstone 1857: 519; McGregor 2009: 48.

[43] Livingstone 1857: 518.

[44] See McGregor (2003) for further discussion of the differing sociocultural meanings of the Kololo and Leya names: 721. The Kololo, whose influence was greatest north of the Zambezi river, and the Ndebele/Matabele, whose influence stretched south of the Zambezi, were the strongest native power in the mid-19th century south-central African interior. "Shungu na mutitima" is an alternate transliteration of the Kololo name.

(re)naming the falls, Livingstone evoked their simultaneous act of laying a territorial claim on the landscape. By himself (re)naming the falls, with the title of the Queen of England no less, Livingstone gestured towards his own act of laying claim on the landscape, however symbolic.

Yet, Livingstone's textured views of the Zambezian environment—perhaps reflecting his multiple agendas as formal or informal emissary for Jesus Christ, merchant capitalism, and the British monarch—were smoothed out for publication in *Missionary Travels* and other books aimed at popular readership in the metropoles of Europe and North America. As McGregor has suggested, Livingstone had no natural disposition for grandiose turns-of-phrase and would hardly have invoked the visions of "angels" if left to his own discretion; Livingstone actually considered landscape features like the Victoria Falls to be "'frightful' features that 'spoiled the river.'"[45] In his mercantile frame-of-mind, Livingstone reflected: "The waterfalls of Mosioatunya….explain why commercial enterprise never entered the interior of the continent except by foot travellers. I am sorry for it. My dreams of establishing commerce by means of the rivers vanish as I become better acquainted with them. But who can contend against nature?"[46] That type of sentiment would have likely done little good—and perhaps great harm—to the aim of motivating further British exploration and, consequently, features not in his popular books published in his lifetime but in his private journals published a century later by the influential social anthropologist Isaac Schapera.

Livingstone did not establish British dominion over the territory and environment of south-central Africa; his question "But who can contend against nature?" strikes a very different chord than the triumphant exclamations of imperial power that would follow him (and had preceded him elsewhere in the world). Yet, Livingstone partly inspired, and even initiated, the burgeoning colonial project in the upper Zambezi basin through his acts of observation and inscription. Exemplified in the naming of Victoria Falls, these symbolically-potent acts began "to obscure local structures of authority."[47] Because "[t]he landscape of the waterfall began to accrete European names and associations" following Livingstone's christening, McGregor contends, "British imperial horizons extended north from Cape Town to encompass it."[48] Economic ambitions for expansion were a fixture of imperialism, but a colony in the southern African interior—and others beyond—became a conceivable reality for British colonizers through Livingstone's discursive claim.

Livingstone and his widely-renowned exploits in the Zambezi basin and elsewhere inspired many a young European to pursue fame, fortune, or something else entirely in the African interior, among them Frederick Courteney Selous, an archetypal (if less well known) imperial

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[45] McGregor 2009: 48; quoting Schapera 1963.
[46] Schapera 1963: 287.
[47] McGregor 2009: 52. My argument is strongly influenced by the work of literary critic and postcolonial theorist Edward Said, especially in his 1993 essay collection *Culture and Imperialism*. Cultural forms, particularly popular travel writing, preceded and precipitated larger-scale imperial conquest, Said convincingly explained.
[48] Ibid. The Cape Colony had been a lucrative, geopolitically significant outpost since the Dutch arrived in the mid-1600s. When the British gained control at the start of the 19th century, the Cape served as a base for their colonial expansion further and further northward, first into Bechuanaland (Botswana) and then Zambezia.

adventure-seeker in Africa's "wilderness."[49] Born to an aristocratic family in London as the year 1851 was drawing to a close—and just as Livingstone was voyaging into the heart of Africa for the first time—Selous arrived on the shores of the eastern Cape of South Africa not quite two decades later, armed with 300 pounds of luggage (including state-of-the-art artillery), 400 pounds sterling, "an inborn love of all branches of Natural History," and "that desire so common amongst our countrymen of penetrating to regions where no one else has been."[50] Unlike Livingstone who targeted the souls of black African folk for Christian conversion and commercial-capital integration, Selous principally targeted the hides of Africa's unique and then uniquely abundant large game for the thrill of the hunt and the more tangible economic benefits that accompanied successful shots, like the ivory of elephant tusks or the pelts of various animals that could both be sold for profit. And while Livingstone's traveling crews, too, need have hunted for meat to sustain them on their voyages—and indeed, pre-colonial African peoples were active participants in the lives and deaths of animal cohabitants—Selous and the colonial aristocratic class of hunters more consciously and consistently altered the Zambezi ecologies.[51]

Frederick Courteney Selous, ca. 1875

Early episodes in Selous' memoir/travelogue/hunting guide *A Hunter's Wanderings in Africa* (1907) recount his first encounters with the native human and non-human populations of southern

[49] Indeed, as Mandiringana & Stapleton (1998) observe, Selous was the initial inspiration behind the "Great White Hunter" stock hero who would figure prominently in late Victorian popular fiction like Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. See also Stephen Taylor's (1989) action-adventure hagiography, *The Might Nimrod: A Life of Frederick Courteney Selous, African Hunter and Adventurer*.

[50] Selous 1907: 1.

[51] Hughes' (2010) historical ethnography of white settlers and their descendants in (Southern) Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and their relationship to 'nature' explains in fine detail how these colonists brought a thoroughly British (ca. 19th century) conception of environments and natural beauty to the southern African interior and remade these lands in their English image.

Africa, suggesting the emerging colonial mindset towards these lands and its inhabitants.[52] On spying a lion for the first time "out of a cage"—a creature fabled in the stories that had so "captivated [his] imagination" back in Britain—Selous' first instinct was to grab his gun, take aim, and fire.[53] When his shot missed its mark, he noted that he was "a good deal disappointed with [his] first encounter with lions"; his goal was blood, trophy, conquest, and anything less was viewed as failure.[54]

Selous' recollections of his initial meeting with Lobengula, the king of the territory that became known as Matabeleland in western Zimbabwe, are marked with less trigger-happiness (fortunately for Lobengula) but an equal desire for conquest.[55] Per Selous, Lobengula viewed young Frederick, merely twenty years old at the time and noticeably so, with some benign suspicion, surprised and amused that someone with such an infantile face had come to hunt elephants and not a smaller and, in his mind, more suitable creature:

> I said I had come to hunt elephants, upon which [Lobengula] burst out laughing, and said, 'Was it not steinbucks' (a diminutive species of antelope) 'that you came to hunt? Why, you're only a boy.' I replied that, although a boy, I nevertheless wished to hunt elephants, and asked his permission to do so, upon which he made some further disparaging remarks regarding my youthful appearance, and then rose to go without giving me any answer.[56]

That Selous' conversation was with Lobengula is uniquely significant. The son of the famed Ndebele king Mzilikazi, who conquered territory south of the Zambezi after being pushed north from the Transvaal region by waves of Boer migrations, Lobengula was a powerful leader of one of the most powerful kingdoms in the southern African interior.[57] Selous asked permission to hunt on Ndebele territory precisely because Lobengula—then one of few African chiefs of this stature—maintained the authority to attempt to "limit and control" European interference in the African environment, though these regulatory efforts generally had "little success," historian William Beinart has noted.[58] Lobengula, however, impressed Selous on some level, for two days later, the ever-persistent Briton asked again for approval to hunt the elephants on Matabele territory.[59] After some back and forth, the Ndebele leader finally relented, remarking "'Oh! they will soon drive you out of the country, but you may go and see what you can do!'"[60] How wrong Lobengula was; Selous took down a good many elephant, loosening Ndebele grip on the territory with it.[61]

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[52] Much more than Livingstone's, Selous's writings, and actions, evince a colonial motive of conquest and control.
[53] Selous 1907: 1, 31.
[54] Ibid.: 32.
[55] There is, however, scant historical evidence—besides Selous' own self-reported memory almost four decades removed—that this interaction with Lobengula in fact occurred as described or at all.
[56] Ibid.: 36.
[57] Rasmussen 1978.
[58] Beinart 2000: 272.
[59] Selous 1907: 36.
[60] Ibid.
[61] At the end of his successful hunting expedition in Matabeleland, Selous (1907: 63) purportedly returned to Lobengula to pay him tribute with one of his few surviving horses as a gift of thanks. But speaking of Lobengula some 45 years

Indeed, through a certain lens, the Selous-Lobengula encounter—factual, embellished, or wholly fabricated for the text—can almost be seen as one iteration of a particular colonial fantasy, wherein the European upstart arrives on the turf of the unsuspecting native chief and bests him with superior skill and savvy (at least more skill and more savvy than Lobengula expected). To Selous and his ilk, lions and elephants were for hunting and African kings or chiefs were for usurping, if not in deed (fully, yet) then in spirit. Through domination of the environment, embodied in the figure of that largest of African creatures, the elephant, Selous established another layer of power over the African landscape by taming its "wild"-ness for his own pleasure and material benefit.[62]

Selous represents what historian William Beinart has called the "predatory character of settler-imperial hunting in southern Africa," a rapacious disposition which also, somewhat paradoxically, laid the ground for a subsequent relationship to the environment: conservation.[63] The imperial-aristocratic ethos of the hunt demanded a natural playground with unquenchable supplies of game for shooting; not least because previously unregulated European hunting had so "catastrophically reduced wildlife" populations in Africa, later hunters of the same imperial milieu took a most active role in enacting policies to preserve game stocks in protected areas.[64] The final and most important element of making this vision a reality came through the most decisive phase of establishing colonial rule over African land and the environment: territorial acquisition (or seizure), in which Cecil John Rhodes was the key figure in the Zambezi basin.[65]

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later, Selous remarked: "I am happy to say that during the last few years that I have known him, he has discarded European clothing, and now always appears in his own native dress, in which he looks what he is—the chief of a savage and barbarous people" (35). No longer a respectful young lad—and with British colonial rule now entrenched—Selous turned the rhetorical tables on Lobengula, diminishing the king's stature with labels of "savagery" and "barbarity," racialized notions crucial in both colonization and conservation efforts. Africans deemed 'sub-human' in the imperial mind were more easily naturalized into landscapes that legitimated European rule.

[62] The "wild" character of Africa, so ubiquitous in Euro-American representations of Africa from the 1800s (and earlier) to the present, is itself a construct that has attracted a great deal of scholarly attention—see Adams & McShane (1997), for example. As Derek Gregory (2001: 88) importantly contends, across the colonial world "'nature' was not only dominated: it was also *domesticated*."

[63] Beinart 2000: 272.

[64] MacKenzie 1988; Beinart 2000: 272. European-style protected areas have elsewhere been labelled "fortress conservation"—see Brockington 2002.

[65] As McGregor (2009: 56-7) notes: "Selous thus spans the transition between the mid-nineteenth-century preoccupation with river routes and trade with the interior [as embodied by Livingstone], and the late-nineteenth-century concern with occupation and territorial control [as embodied by Rhodes], which required different sorts of knowledge about the landscape, ushered in a period of concessions and treaties with African rulers, and resulted in the drawing of state borders."

"The Rhodes Colossus Striding from Cape Town to Cairo," Edward Linley Sambourne, 1892

Cecil Rhodes was the most pivotal single actor in the colonial histories of present-day Zambia and Zimbabwe—each previously known under names bearing tribute to him for around 75 and 90 years, respectively—by leading the establishment of British rule in the deep interior of Africa through his British South Africa Company. From the 1880s on, Rhodes' BSAC gained much of its power and wealth through the expropriation of territory and the exploitation of natural resources like diamonds, coal, and other minerals across southern Africa to fuel commercial, industrial, and capital appetites in the imperial metropole.[66] Rhodes facilitated future consolidation of colonial control over political and environmental power structures, as company rule turned to crown rule and his personal gift of land-estates to the government of Southern Rhodesia served as the basis for an emergent National Parks-based conservation regime.[67]

Following the arrival of Livingstone and Selous and others like them, the Zambezia region began to be "recognized as part of the British sphere of influence" through the negotiating acumen of Rhodes, amid the array of power-plays and maneuverings that characterized imperial Europe at the time.[68] Because of the British recognition of the Zambezi River's function as a "'natural border' simply because it was a feature of the landscape" as well as a (reductive) recognition of

[66] Keppel-Jones 1983. For reasons to be discussed further, the BSAC's mineral dealings in the Rhodesias would be far less successful than they had been in South Africa, necessitating a turn towards agriculture as the primary economic activity of the colonies (see Nyandoro 2012: 304-305).
[67] Himself not a particularly avid hunter, Rhodes did hire hunters to collect animals (live, presumably) for his personal zoo in Cape Town and for the Specimen Collection of the Cape Town Museum; MacKenzie 1988: 39, 52n.
[68] McGregor 2009: 58.

then-powerful African kingdoms' own geopolitical spheres of influence, "[s]eparate administrations were set up on either side of the [Zambezi] river" in what would eventually become known as Northern and Southern Rhodesia (and later Zambia and Zimbabwe, respectively).[69] With independent administrations on either side of the Zambezi, "[s]eparate structures of authority thus persisted, differing both in the degree of imperial control over Native Affairs, and in the way settler interests were (or were not) represented," with regards to issues of political but also of environmental governance.[70]

Tied into the political-economic conquest of the Zambezia were the imperial-aristocratic dreams Rhodes shared with Selous and other colonial hunters of marvelous, unspoilt African nature. South African architect Sir Herbert Baker remembered his patron Rhodes thus:

> His intense and genuine love of the big and beautiful in natural scenery prompted him to buy as much as he could of the forest slopes of Table Mountain [in the Cape Colony], so that it might be saved for ever from the hands of the builder, and the people, attracted to it by gardens, [and] wild animals….might be educated and ennobled by the contemplation of what he thought one of the finest views in the world.[71]

Rhodes' view of landscape was highly aestheticized, and this spirit—marked both with wondrous awe at the sight of nature and a desire to preserve such a vision in perpetuity for a certain, highly-limited group of "the people"—continued beyond Cape Town through his later travels to the African interior.[72]

In fact, Rhodes himself laid the groundwork for the spread of Yellowstone-style protected area conservation in the Rhodesias.[73] As Graham Child, the African-born Brit serving as Director of National Parks and Wild Life Management in (Southern) Rhodesia, noted in 1977, "A Western form of government was introduced to Rhodesia in 1890 and by 1902 Cecil John Rhodes had created two areas, one in the Matopos and one at Inyanga, which, in all but name, met the then accepted criteria

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[69] McGregor (2009) further notes this division was "not through design, but through BSAC and British government reactions to unfolding events after 1893 (including war with the Ndebele provoked by the BSAC, abusive Company rule, the fiasco of the Jameson raid and the rebellions of 1896). The Foreign Office had planned to extend BSAC rule north of the river by handing over administrative responsibility for Barotseland, but this was impossible in the context of widespread criticism of the Company in Britain" (58-59). First, Barotseland, named to recognize the territorial influence of the Lozi people, became Northwestern Rhodesia under the semi-protectorial control of the BSAC and then was ultimately incorporated with the more recently acquired Northeastern Rhodesia to make Northern Rhodesia in 1911. Again, a river, the Kafue, was mapped as the 'natural border' between the two territories.

[70] Ibid. Southern Rhodesia attracted a much larger white settler population than did Northern Rhodesia.

[71] Quoted in Pooley 2014: 135.

[72] McGregor (2009: 92, 102n) notes that Rhodes' famous plans for a 'Cape to Cairo' railway under British control were in part connected to his aim of ensuring colonial tourists access to the natural splendor of the African continent.

[73] See Sellars (1997) for an historical overview of the early conservation movement in the United States, including the history of Yellowstone National Park. Yellowstone, I found in 2016 interviews in Zambia and Zimbabwe, remains a principal referent in understandings of the role of national parks in contemporary conservation practice worldwide.

of national parks."[74] Having acquired private land in both the western and eastern frontiers of his namesake territory, Rhodes entrusted these lands to the Southern Rhodesian government at the time of his death in 1902; commenting on his desired burial ground on the estates, Rhodes noted in his will that "I admire the grandeur and loneliness of the Matopos in Zimbabwe and therefore I desire to be buried in the Matopos on the hill which I used to visit and which I called the 'View of the World.'"[75] This single sentiment is rich with metaphorical heft—intentional or not—encompassing the historical continuum from symbolically inscribing power on the landscape through names to conquering and taming the "wild"-ness of the landscape (this time, climbing up hills rather than taking down elephants) to finally and fully acquiring and possessing the landscape in legal and material terms; committing his very body to African soil was Rhodes' ultimate display of possession. And per director Child, Rhodes' Matopos (as the national park in the area was, for a time, called) set in motion a conservation process in which "further sanctuary areas were proclaimed and [which] culminated in the present Parks and Wild Life Estate extending over some 10% of the country."[76]

That process by which Rhodes' burial in the ground of Zimbabwe expanded into an entire conservation infrastructure was complexly entangled in the related process of consolidating colonial control over the territory and over the environment. The years 1923 and 1924 marked the political transition away from British South African Company administration towards a self-governing Dominion territory (Southern Rhodesia) and a crown protectorate (Northern Rhodesia)[77]—these developments also marked a change in the fate of the Matopos estate. Much like the creation of Kruger National Park for white Afrikaners in South Africa, the development of Rhodes' Matopos into what became Rhodes Matopos National Park was an opportunity for white Anglos in Southern Rhodesia to assert continued control over the formerly African-ruled landscape through symbolic veneration of a colonial hero, whose remains had consecrated the very ground as British, as Rhodesian.[78] However, the thrifty BSAC Board were for many years "reluctant to commit themselves to the expense of a formal National Park" at the Matopos, and the project had stalled under their watch since 1902.[79] In 1924, one Southern Rhodesian conservationist made "an appeal to the newly dominant settler public opinion" to make the Matopos a formally established national park, further enshrining Rhodes' presence in the landscape, and by 1926, the appeal was successful.[80] The increased political autonomy of the white Rhodesian settlers after the withdrawal of the BSAC made possible new uses of the natural landscape, such as the formal completion of the national park.

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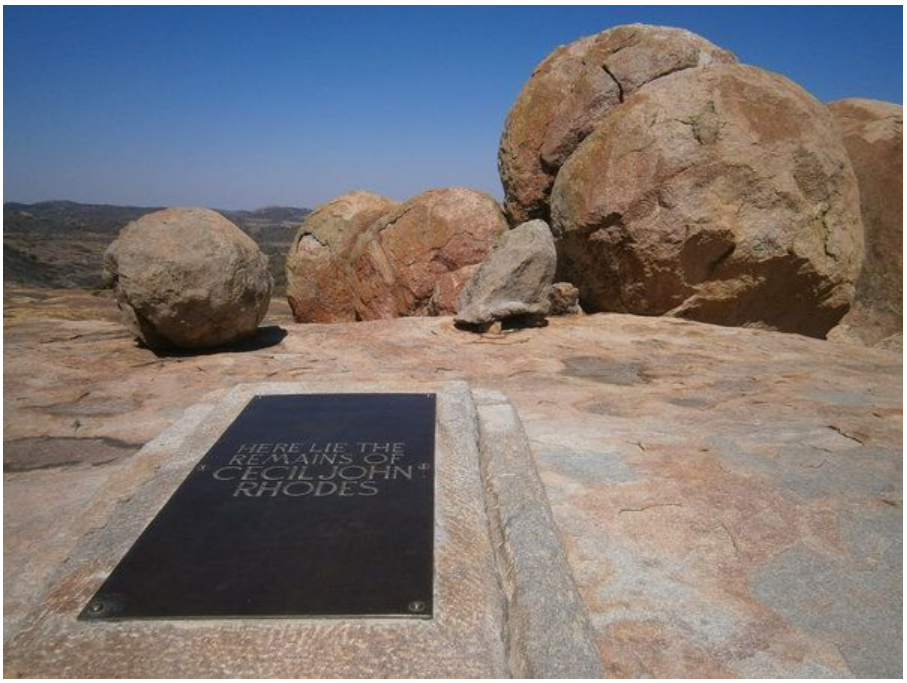
[74] Child 1977: 118-119.
[75] Parts of the "Will of the Late Right Honourable Cecil John Rhodes" are excerpted in (Southern) Rhodesia's Rhodes Estates Acts of 1978.
[76] Child 1977: 119.
[77] Tilley 2011: 6.
[78] Carruthers 1995; Ranger 1999: 61; Hughes 2010.
[79] Ranger *ibid.*
[80] Ranger 1999: 61-62. Interestingly, that environmentalist, one E.A. Hobbs, like Selous, naturalized the native communities of the Matopos into the landscape by framing their "uncivilized," sub-human traditions as "picturesque."

These new connections to the environment then facilitated the consolidation a colonial political identity itself made necessary by the withdrawal of the BSAC.[81]



Cecil Rhodes' grave site in the Matopos National Park, Zimbabwe

Rhodes' ownership of the Matopos and Nyanga estates in Southern Rhodesia was not unique but instead part of a larger movement of colonial dispossession in the region, as across the continent and across the colonized world.[82] Though hunting and related activities like tourism were deeply embedded into the colonial mission in south-central Africa, there were other, more central economic aims to establishing British control, particularly the direct conversion of the natural environment into resource commodities for trade or for use back in Europe.[83] Rhodes and the BSAC's previous successes in South Africa with mining proved not easily replicable in the Zambezi basin; per Mark Nyandoro, "after 1890, when the hoped-for mineral discoveries proved disappointing, many of colonial Zimbabwe's white settlers turned to agriculture."[84] (The far-north

[81] Because the population of Anglo-Europeans concerned with conservation (whether for sporting or scientific purposes) was much higher in Southern Rhodesia than in Northern Rhodesia—and perhaps because the formation of Southern Rhodesia entailed much more violent conflict between Anglo-European settlers and African natives than in Northern Rhodesia—efforts to assert dominance over the environment through dispossession and displacement in the South were correspondingly greater than in the North.

[82] Dispossession was—and still all-too-frequently is—a very violent procedure. Alongside his own grave, Rhodes wanted Matopos to also serve as a memorial to his fellow men in arms who had lost their lives in wars with the dispossession-resisting Matabele (Ndebele) in the 1890s.

[83] "Cape to Cairo," the tagline of the Rhodesian/Victorian imperial ambitions in Africa, was sometimes thought of in touristic terms during the colonial period, and in the present-day is still an oft-recurring marketing motif.

[84] Nyandoro 2012: 304.

Copperbelt that has long supported the economy of Northern Rhodesia/Zambia is the exception that seems to prove the rule for areas nearer the Zambezi.) Consequently, the emergence of colonial agriculture "marked the beginning of loss of land ownership rights by many African farmers" as the BSAC authorities in Rhodesia stripped from native Africans "their right to own prime agricultural land and water—two very vital and contentious natural resources."[85] Under the colonial-agricultural regime, new and more intensive forms of environmental governance corresponded with the establishment broader political and territorial control. It was in this context that an explicit, scientific idea of "conservation" first originated in the southern African interior.

A POLITICAL SCIENCE

The first wave of colonist-designed conservation practices for south-central Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, such as protected game reserves, represented an attempt to make an aesthetically-influenced material claim on the Zambezi basin.[86] Yet, the next wave of conservation practices, including new methods of soil maintenance, emerged as a response to finding the agro-landscape not as naturally profitable as hoped—a realization only possible after having established a greater measure of territorial control. Because agriculture was a necessary economic driver of these colonies, the colonial government began to undertake ever-bolder strategies to improve how resources were extracted from the land, not least because there was now the methodological apparatus to do so; indeed, Terence Ranger sums, "the further development of the colonial sciences which ushered in the second conservationist age [was] so different in tone from [earlier] romanticism."[87] Whereas the earliest would-be conservationists relied primarily on imperial fantasies of hunting magnificent creatures found only on the savannas of Africa to structure new environmental paradigms, the succeeding generation began to rely on imperial bureaucratic systems of data and data-collection. Both approaches, however, were firmly situated in the familiar power imbalance and uneven distribution of benefits and costs between colonizer and colonized.

A pair of Southern Rhodesian laws dating from the peak of colonial rule—the Land Tenure and Land Apportionment Acts of 1930—exemplify the increasingly emboldened (quasi-technocratic) stance of the colonial state toward the Zambezian peoples and environments they governed. Patterns of dispossession that had officially commenced with the birth of the Rhodesian states in 1890 were accelerated four decades later with the Land Tenure and Apportionment Acts, which "appropriated most of the fertile communal land from the majority of

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[85] Ibid.: 304-305. Nyandoro contends that dispossession was facilitated through the colonial imposition of a conception of property ownership foreign to Zambezian cultures: "Although struggles over rights to individually or collectively held plots existed in pre-colonial times these were intensified during the colonial period mainly because customary tenure was being rewritten and sometimes re-invented. Colonial authorities erroneously assumed that the European concept of proprietary ownership covered the full range of customary land-rights in Africa" (300).

[86] David M. Hughes' (2010) monograph *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Race, Landscape, and the Problem of Belonging* is indispensable on this subject.

[87] Ranger 1999: 62.

the population and converted it into commercial farms for the white settler minority."[88] In practice and in principle, too, these laws revoked "the rights of the Africans to land ownership anywhere in the colony."[89] Fundamentally, these drastic measures were "predicated on the myth that the locals were not able to sustainably use the natural resources that they had at their disposal," and certainly not as well as could the best scientific minds of the mighty British Empire.[90] To conserve the fertility, utility, and profitability of the Zambezian soils in perpetuity, the Land Tenure and Apportionment Acts mobilized the (so-thought) rational truths of science "to justify intervention into the ways in which Africans lived and farmed," in the process dramatically "extending state control."[91] Here conservation science collaborated with—and, perhaps, reinforced—colonial modes of governance.

Moreover, "because [these laws] were designed in the context of conquest and subjugation," Munyaradzi Mawere has contended, the intended environmental benefits were not even accomplished; these laws, he argues, only "increased the strain on the environment in countryside areas, thereby compromising the conservational capabilities of the rural communities."[92] More often than the European scientists themselves would likely ever have admitted, the suggestions of these colonial experts were often decisively ill-suited to the environmental conditions of the Zambezi basin. Any failures these experts quite readily identified in indigenous agricultural practice were often related back to changes wrought by colonization in the first place. Zambezian societies, which had long learned to adapt their own survival to changes in the environment and thus had their own insights into its management, were ignored, disempowered, and then blamed for failure.[93]

Alongside the forced adoption of colonial scientific practices aimed at conserving the agricultural vitality and productivity of Zambezian environments, the rise of ecology as a fully-fledged Euro-American scientific discipline in the late 19th century opened an opportunity for new modes of governance for the Rhodesian states.[94] The consequences of the new ecological science were wide reaching. From the 1930s on, colonial, national, and imperial conservation

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[88] Mawere 2013: 86.
[89] Nyandoro 2012: 305.
[90] Mawere 2013: 87.
[91] Alexander 2006: 25. Furthermore, Alexander continues, "conservationist concerns were used to justify an array of punitive measures to enforce 'good husbandry' and provide labour for conservation works. African 'rights' to land were to be subordinated to the discipline of 'development'" (47).
[92] Mawere 2013. It was easy for the Southern Rhodesian government to 'compromis[e] the conservation capabilities' of native Africans because colonial scientists did not often, in fact, recognize any such capabilities: "[T]he colonial government hostilely rejected as backward all indigenous conservation practices and thinking rather than seeking to usefully combine local and modern scientific knowledge in the national conservation project" (88).
[93] E.g., Worthington (1983: 42-43) regarding shifting cultivation: "Many were the occasions when a newly arrived [colonial] agriculturalist would persuade the local peasants to plant a pure stand of one crop or another, only to find that some pest or disease swept through the whole whereas on a near-by traditional mixed plot the pest, though attacking individual plants, had difficulty getting through the adjoining vegetation next to its host."
[94] See Cooper (2004) for discussion of ecology's disciplinary evolution from the renascent discipline of natural history, especially as practiced by Darwin; for instance, the term "ecology" (*ökologie*) was first coined by German scientist Ernst Haeckel in 1866, and the term "ecosystem" was first printed in 1935 by British scientist Arthur Tansley, the founding director of the U.K.'s Nature Conservancy.

regimes existed alongside explicitly multinational (or multi-imperial) conservation regimes, much of which exist in various forms to the present. Indeed, a conference among multiple European imperial powers in London in 1933 saw the ratification of the Convention Relative to the Preservation of Fauna and Flora in their Natural State, often called the "'Magna Charta"' (*sic*) of wildlife preservation policies, which did much to expand national parks and other protected area regimes beyond the limits they had achieved to that point.[95]

Ecologies were not foreign to the societies of the Zambezi basin, but in many respects this "ecology" was. Lyn Schumaker, a scholar of the history of science in Africa, has offered the crucial reminder that science should not be naturally seen as foreign to African societies, but there were a multitude of ways that these particular ecological-scientific practices situated in the Euro-African imperial milieu were deliberately kept detached from African knowledge traditions.[96] (The ecology referenced here is a historically particular scientific discipline, an epistemological tradition that later thinkers like Tim Ingold have called profoundly "anti-ecological."[97] After tracing its history here, I will work with more expansive notions of ecologies in subsequent chapters.)

As E. Barton Worthington, once a chief scientist and African specialist for the British environmental agency the Nature Conservancy Council, wrote in his 1983 memoir *The Ecological Century*, the ecologist's perspective revolved around questions of:

> [H]ow *Homo sapiens* could himself take benefit from this vast ecological complex which was Africa, how he could live and multiply on the income of the natural resources without destroying their capital (except in the case of minerals), and how he could conserve the values of Africa for future generations, not only the economic values but also the scientific and ethical values.[98]

Worthington's sentiment suggests an understanding of humans fitting *within* intricate ecosystems rather than simply *above* them, as those of the aristocratic hunting tradition may have believed. But the colonial ecologist's magnanimity generally appeared more often in considering interspecific relations than in intraspecific ones; this ecologically-minded conservation science tended to rely on and reproduce racialized power hierarchies. For instance, one rarely-voiced attitude among these conservationists, which Worthington divulges, baldly privileges respect for the lives of certain non-human animals—most likely the same charismatic megafauna, mostly big mammals, who were so central to the ideology of the hunt—over the lives of certain non-white humans: "Many of those who wish to see the wonderful wild life of Africa surviving for ever have a sneaking suspicion that tsetse flies may be their best friends, for they have locked up areas of wild life against the invasions of man."[99] (I need hardly mention that tsetse flies are the main vectors of the disease

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[95] Boardman 1981: 34.
[96] Schumaker 2001: 327.
[97] Ingold 2000.
[98] Worthington 1983: 46.
[99] Ibid.

trypanosomiasis, the largest outbreak of which, for instance, resulted in the deaths of nearly a quarter million Ugandans in the early 1900s.[100] What value the tsetse fly can be said to have had, surely, would depend on who was asked.) Though Worthington's phrasing of his fellow ecologists' thoughts leaves some semantic ambiguity as to who, in fact, is incriminated for "the invasions of man," the practice of eco-conservationism in Africa (e.g., "fortress conservation") left no doubt: the native African had to be kept out to protect wild life.[101]

Indeed, to return to Rhodes' Matopos estate, the final stages in securing full National Park status required "a commitment to a depopulated Matopos," as was orthodox in the growing international (ecologically-influenced) conservation community from the 1930s on.[102] "Under the influence of international conservationism, romance was giving way to science," Ranger has noted, and the so-called primitive traditions of native peoples were no longer welcome attractions in wilderness areas.[103] African peoples themselves were the invasive ones, in this European scientific mindset, threatening to spoil the harmony of nature, no matter that "[i]t was Africans who fashioned the landscapes of grasslands and savannas with their teeming vistas of wild animals which Northerners came to admire and to try and preserve as part of their legacy."[104]

While agriculturally- and ecologically-oriented conservation processes were entrenching colonial power further and further into the physical African landscape—in tandem despite their seeming opposition[105]—the macro-political winds of change were blowing towards the ends of empires in Europe.[106] In British south-central Africa, the transitional period before imperial withdrawal was the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, or Central African Federation, uniting what are now Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi between 1953 and 1963. Though the Federation was widely unpopular throughout its existence—near its conclusion, one British reporter labelled it a "misbegotten" experiment that "failed before it began"[107]—one constituency seemingly uniquely in favor of federalism, a late vestige of colonial authority, was the conservationist. Indeed, on a survey

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[100] Fèvre et al. 2004.

[101] The terminology used in environmental discourse evolved, too, from "game" to "wild life" (or increasingly "wildlife" to reflect American grammatical patterns—a sign of American neocolonialism?) mirroring the changing attitudes towards non-human animals from objects of the hunt to subjects of the ecosystem. See also Brockington 2002.

[102] Ranger 1999: 167; see Worthington (1983) for more on the international conservation community.

[103] Ranger *ibid*. Child (1977) cites the "ignorance and thoughtlessness" of humans on the outskirts of conservation areas as a persistent obstacle to successful conservation in Rhodesia. The rate at which "tribal" Africans were, and still are, cast as villains for poaching and other contraventions of conservation agendas strongly hints at whom Child considered "ignorant" (see also Huxley 1961).

[104] Marks 1984: 4-5. See also Fairhead & Leach's (1996) classic study of the precolonial fashioning of forest-savannah mosaics in Guinea.

[105] Indeed, geographer Bram Büscher (2013) has argued that agricultural conservation and wildlife conservation were essentially "mirror image[s]" in the colonial project: "In both cases, whites further grounded their control over the region through the construction of particular ideas and associated spatial practices about what entailed legitimate land use, whereby 'African attitudes and interests were ignored or over-ridden' (Carruthers 1995: 65) (34)."

[106] British PM Harold MacMillan delivered a famous speech in Cape Town in 1960 that employed the metaphor of the "wind of change" acknowledging the upsurge of African nationalism and the end it spelled for imperial power, compounding on the challenges and costs already facing post-WWII Europe.

[107] Franklin 1963.

of conservation practice in east and southern Africa for UNESCO in 1960, eminent British biologist Julian Huxley heaped praise on the Federation as the best means for "fruitfully" enacting a "comprehensive" conservation strategy in the view that political unification could most easily and effectively facilitate the quick and widespread embrace of internationally-approved environmental ideas.[108] In fact, one of the earliest actions on the federal agenda was the 1954 Federal National Parks Act, which unified this aspect of conservation across the three participatory states; by the 1950s, the colonial and conservation projects both had advanced much farther in Southern Rhodesia—with its considerable white settler population and an extensive protected area infrastructure—than in either Northern Rhodesia or Nyasaland, so the 1954 law was effectively an attempt to spread Southern Rhodesia's environmental management models northward.[109]

Aerial photo of Victoria Falls taken by Julian Huxley, ca. 1960

Another moment key to the crystallization of conservation ideologies still influential in the Zambezi basin today was the creation of the Kariba Dam by the colonial ("Central African") Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in the late 1950s. The Kariba Dam was a major hydroelectric development on the Zambezi River—the border between Northern and Southern

[108] Huxley 1961: 89.
[109] Tomlinson 1980: 162.

Rhodesia—envisioned as "the flagship project" of the colonial settler-dominated Federation. Indeed, one Southern Rhodesian considered Kariba "'a monument to the white man's genius,'" though the Federation and Kariba projects both were alternately framed as "interracial 'partnership[s]'" by some in command.[110] Interestingly, plans for a dam at Kariba were pushed ahead by forces as high up as the Federation's Prime Minister, Lord Malvern (a Southern Rhodesian), supplanting earlier-drawn and, indeed, already-begun plans to build a dam on the Kafue River in central Northern Rhodesia. White Southern Rhodesian leaders wanted greater access to hydroelectric energy for their own territory and thus wielded their greater powers in the Federation to direct governmental attention and resources to the cross-boundary Kariba project, which could serve both Northern *and* Southern Rhodesia, unlike Kafue, whose generated energy would mainly have remained in the former.

Once selected, the project at Kariba necessitated the removal of between 20,000 and 60,000 local (mostly Tonga) people, who received minimal or zero financial compensation, just as massive dam projects continue to do around the world.[111] The Tonga were considered particularly "backward" by colonial authorities, so moving the Tonga out of their riverine homeland and resettling them was thought to "'only be to their advantage,'" as Lord Malvern said in 1955.[112] The Kariba dam did eventually draw sensational global public attention and outcry, not for the mass toll of displacement on Tonga livelihoods but for the effects on the area's non-human animal populations, as dam-induced floodwaters that became Lake Kariba resulted in the "drowning and starving [of] animals trapped on [newly-inundated] islands."[113] Consequently, in 1958, a coalition of British and Rhodesian-settler environmentalists organized "Operation Noah"—the "'greatest animal rescue since the ark'"—to raise funds from the Global North to be able to literally swoop in and helicopter stranded wildlife to safety.

Operation Noah took advantage of increasing interest among the Euro-American public in a romanticized view of charismatic fauna (e.g., the Bambi effect) and the development of a global environmental governance infrastructure from the 1930s on—including the 1933 London Convention and the establishment of the IUCN in 1948—to newly entrench conservationists' ecologically minded views of the value of nature, pushing considerations of "wildlife as an aesthetic and economic resource" in a late-colonial Rhodesian society, white European and black African alike, "that had a much less romanticized view of the animal world than [did] urban publics overseas."[114] From the global attention to Operation Noah, colonial authorities in the Federation and its individual member states (who may or may not have had ecological sensibilities) recognized a potentially lucrative market for international ecotourism, "strengthen[ing] the hand" of (Northern and Southern) Rhodesian environmentalists and their conservation agendas.[115] By 1961, merely three

[110] McGregor 2009: 105-6.
[111] Colson 1975; Hughes 2006: 823. See also Goldman 2005.
[112] McGregor 2009: 110-1.
[113] Ibid.: 117.
[114] Ibid.: 118.
[115] Ibid.: 119.

years after Operation Noah began, Southern Rhodesian conservation authorities had tripled their land holdings, including around Lake Kariba where rescued wildlife populated a conservation zone that eventually became a protected game reserve and is now Zimbabwe's Matusadona National Park. "In these institutional ways," David M. Hughes has concluded, "Kariba's flood *made* conservation," certainly in this corner of southern Africa.[116] Though ideologically opposed to Kariba's development and unable to prevent its creation, late-colonial conservationism exploited the dam's consequences to consolidate new environmental authority.[117]

CHANGE IN THE WINDS?

At this point, I must acknowledge that this story has been woefully short on African voices—due in part to a dearth of readily accessible sources but also to my own neglect. The native peoples of the Zambezi basin were not passive recipients of colonial dictates but instead actively challenged, resisted, and otherwise shaped the process, albeit with generally curtailed agency; crucial, too, is recognition of the vastly heterogeneous experiences of the region's different native groups.[118]

An archived summary of a monthly meeting in 1953 between Northern Rhodesian Native Authority bureaucrats and the natives under their colonial authority provides a rare glimpse into the perspective of some of the colonized on the interventions into their lives enacted in the name of conservation early in the federal period. In the summary, Chief Malama argues that the Northern Rhodesian Game Department does not own the game animals it protects on reserves and cannot, then, regulate what is done to them when they leave the reserves (e.g., be killed and eaten); Chief Jumbe points out that native people better know the environment and animal population and so should be able to hunt whatever they choose whenever they are permitted; Senior Chief Nsefu corrects the Provincial Biologist that it was not customary of his people to regulate hunting access by sub-chiefdom as has been codified by the government, etc.[119] The written transcript of this encounter suggests a resigned disapproval of colonial policies by the chiefs, but the continued and increasing success of scientifically-minded conservation in the federal period began to draw more and more fervent responses, rattling and even eroding the very foundations of the Federation.[120]

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[116] Hughes 2006: 830.

[117] During my 2016 fieldwork in Zambia and Zimbabwe, I wondered whether global outcry on a scale similar to Operation Noah at the death of Zimbabwe's über-charismatic lion Cecil, hunted down on the outskirts of Hwange National Park the year before, might be bringing equally momentous changes to African conservation practice, as more and more countries ban the trophy-hunting that has long provided necessary capital for less violent conservation measures (Onishi 2015). Most conservationists I spoke with, of a variety of national backgrounds, did not think so.

[118] JoAnn McGregor (2003, 2009), Jocelyn Alexander (2006), and their teacher/mentor Terence Ranger (1999) are particularly excellent in documenting the role of the native peoples of the African interior in these histories.

[119] Marks 1984: 108-112. Quoting "District Commissioner's Summary of a Meeting Held by the Kunda Native Authority at Jumbe, Luangwa Valley on 9 October 1953."

[120] As in Kenya, British colonial authorities in the Federation used conservation policies to attempt to reduce population pressures on the land and environment, pressures often stemming from earlier colonial policies; see also, Elkins 2005: 16-17.

Outrage over the land and environmental policies of lingering colonial regimes threatened to entirely dismantle the Federation and in some respects succeeded. As most colonized people in the Federation lived in rural areas, conservation policies (of many varieties) had uniquely salient and perceptible effects. In many such places, Clark Gibson describes, administrative policing of native hunting—typically framed as "poaching" when referring to the behaviors of black Africans to further distinguish the authority and legitimacy of colonial policies—provided "the only direct contact that locals had with government." Hence, frustration over conservation was mobilized as one of the key issues "that local African politicians throughout Northern Rhodesia used to incite opposition to colonial rule."[121] Because territory and the environment, broadly, were central to the largely non-industrial, subsistence livelihoods of the colonized in Zambezia and because colonial forces had so decisively altered those relationships between native peoples and their natural surroundings, "African nationalists understood the costs imposed by wildlife policy [in particular] and exploited them in the drive for Zambia's independence."[122] Kenneth Kaunda, who would become the first president of an independent Zambia, "enthusiastically encouraged his constituents, largely rural in settlement and orientation, to kill any wild animal they wished" as an act of defiance to precipitate the end of the federal—that is, colonial—rule.[123] This anti-colonial movement, often dovetailing with anti-conservation sentiment (at least as conservation was then practiced), proved successful with the collapse of the Federation by the end of 1963 and the creation of independent Zambia and Malawi under black African rule, though Southern Rhodesia, with its larger colonial population and deeper colonial infrastructure, remained under white settler rule as Rhodesia for another decade and a half.

Despite the withdrawal of British imperial power from the Zambezi basin in 1964, however, conservation in the modes developed over the previous century persisted in both Zimbabwe—where white Euro-descendent settlers retained control over the state—and also in African majority-ruled Zambia.[124] Kenneth Kaunda's protests against colonial power and land and environment conservation policies often exercised rhetoric along the lines of "This is African soil" to highlight the apparent inanity of alien European authorities governing the firmly-rooted relationships between Africans and their native environs.[125] Yet, in the course of assuming governmental control and constructing a national identity for postcolonial Zambia, Kaunda's continued assertions of an "African soil" ideal transitioned from denigrating colonial conservation policies to championing (little-different) postcolonial conservation policies. Indeed, by 1966, merely some two years removed from his suggestions to kill wildlife to undermine colonial and Federal authority, Kaunda was now telling Zambia's university students that "all wildlife should be protected

[121] Gibson 1999: 28.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Marks 1984: 105.
[124] In many respects, decolonization brought only illusory changes to authority structures, on both interethnic and international axes; see Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Chambati 2013, for example.
[125] Kaunda 1963: 158.

and conserved as part of the nation's history."[126] Zambia's new national flag, with its symbolic color scheme, is mostly green in recognition of this sense of environmental abundance, I was told by a Zambian friend, himself a conservation biologist born well after independence.

Using apparatus originating from the colonial project, such as national parks and other protected areas, sharpened by cutting-edge ecological findings from the international (i.e., predominantly white) scientific community of Huxley and Worthington, couched in romantic ideals, and driven by capital motives like increasing "tourism and foreign exchange," postcolonial conservation in Kaunda's Zambia featured few substantive changes from what came before.[127] (The roster of top decision-makers changed with decolonization, of course, though interestingly, "the torch pass[ing] from expatriate to Zambian hands" in the conservation bureaucracy was slower than other areas of the government, as the training requirements for environmental leadership positions continued to privilege people who had had the financial and political wherewithal to have a science education under colonial rule.[128]) Kaunda's conservation plans suggest that the colonial history of conservation in Zambia (not unlike Zimbabwe), characterized first by romanticized valuations of African nature and then scientific re-valuations, enabled something of a fusion of aesthetic and scientific ideals in the postcolony.[129]

The history of British colonization in the Zambezi basin connects in clear but complex ways with the making and remaking of conservation principles and practices in the area, from preserving wildlife for hunting by white aristocrats and enriching the fertility of soils (or, at least, attempting to do so) to removing human life from "wild" spaces and forbidding hunting of "wild" animals altogether. These widely diverging efforts to govern the human-environment relations were most similar in who wielded the levels of control, who reaped the benefits, and who faced the costs. The political history of the Zambezi basin is a history of ecological relations. The environmental, or ecological, history of the Zambezi basin is a history of politics. Nature is unnatural.

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[126] Marks 1984: 106. Marks further describes how Kaunda became "convinced" of conservation's necessity after "return[ing] from a vacation in the Luangwa Valley Game Reserve where he also had been briefed by his expatriate wildlife administrators." Moreover, in 1961 Julius Nyerere, the soon-to-be President of Tanganyika/Tanzania, outlined something of a Pan-Africanist environmental ethos in what became known at the Arusha Manifesto on Conservation: "The survival of our wildlife is a matter of grave concern to all of us in Africa. These wild creatures amid the wild places they inhabit are not only important as a source of wonder and inspiration but are an integral part of our natural resources and of our future livelihood and well-being...." (quoted in Worthington 1983: 154).

[127] Gibson 1999: 33. Gibson further details, with great precision, how Kaunda's government presented wildlife conservation policies "strikingly similar" to those presented under colonial rule, especially the 1968 National Parks and Wildlife Bill. "In laying out the [1968] bill's contents, Sikota Wina (minister of local government and acting minister of natural resources)....asserted the overall goal of the UNIP government was the 'preservation of our national heritage' and capacity for wildlife conservation to 'pay its own way.'"

[128] Marks 1984: 117.

[129] Environmental conservation did not transform with political decolonization in part, Gibson (1999) has argued, because conservation was able to produce economic benefits for politically-powerful African elites, a situation only exacerbated with the rise of neoliberalism and capital-friendly modes of conservation, including Transfrontier Conservation Areas.

A NOTE ON UNNATURAL HISTORIES

History matters in Africa, not uniquely in the world, of course, but perhaps *peculiarly*, a word Achille Mbembe uses in all its ironic resonances. It was not so long ago that the world's most "Enlightened" minds—or at least endowed professors at universities made rich through empire—could comfortably declare Africa a place without history. At the same time, the famed Ghanaian politician and thinker Kwame Nkrumah, writing at the mid-1960s height of Pan-Africanist potential, elaborated his prescriptions for African History:

> Our history needs to be written as the history of our society, not as the story of European adventurers. African society must be treated as enjoying its own integrity; its history must be a mirror of that society, and the European contact must find its place in this history only as an African experience, even a crucial one.[130]

Nkrumah's call has been decisively heeded. John Henrik Clarke, Jan Vansina, Stanlake Samkange, Walter Rodney, Basil Davidson, Gwyn Prins, Terence Ranger, and Frederick Cooper are but few of the most notable (Anglophone) historians consistently responsible to the "integrity" of African societies.[131] That task remains a necessary one but is not quite what I have set out to do. Rightly and wrongly, I view this project not quite as a history of southern Africa (even if only one of many) or African history but rather an attempt to map a particular set of connections from past to present—not a history of the Zambezi basin but a history situated in the Zambezi basin.

This chapter emerged as an effort to connect nature and nation in southern Africa and, indeed, to prove that the two were historically constitutive: the process of the British colonization of southern Africa, I would have argued, was bolstered by the development of conservationist regimes of environmental management. Such a project, it now seems to me, encourages a mode of analysis that obscures more than it illuminates. I have still aimed to map political ecological relations across time and space, but rather than force the analysis toward definitive, causal explanation, I have attempted to rethink and, in fact, rewrite earlier research to remove teleologies that only naturalized the experiences of colonization and conservation in southern Zambia and northern Zimbabwe. This chapter is thus something like "unnatural history,"[132] the fruit of my recognition that European colonization did not introduce political and ecological governance to the southern African interior but instead altered the already existing modes of political-ecological relations. Recent work by anthropologists worldwide including Hugh Raffles, Julie Cruikshank, Paige West, and David M. Hughes—as well as more traditional Africanist environmental histories by Richard Grove, Nancy

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[130] Nkrumah 2009 [1964]: 63.

[131] E.g., Clarke 1969; Vansina 1966; Samkange 1969; Rodney 1972; Davidson 1992; Prins 1980; Ranger 1979 [1967], 1985, 1995, 1999; Cooper 2014. I wonder, though, whether or not these historians would consider their work "mirrors" of the societies they studied.

[132] Nature, like wild-ness, has been made mythic—and powerfully so—in Africa (cf. Adams & McShane 1992).

Jacobs, and JoAnn McGregor, among others—have broken significant conceptual ground in this field.[133] I hope this chapter leads me down their trail, if only slightly, slowly.

Much, regrettably, has escaped my attention: from the tribal political-ecological landscape preceding Livingstone's arrival to the fate of the Malozi people whose Barotseland/Northwest Rhodesia for a time remained semi-independent from colonial authority; from Baron Frederick Lugard's 1922 Dual Mandate for British rule in Africa to internal conflicts in the colonial power infrastructure; from the first and second Chimurenga (or revolutionary struggles) in Zimbabwe's history and to the nature of Kenneth Kaunda's 25-year socialist one-party rule and Robert Mugabe's even-longer reign, finally brought to an end since my time in the country in 2016.

What I want to emphasize at last is the wholly partial nature of unnatural history. Unlike the Enlightenment's totalizing, taxonomic urge that inspired the modern resurgence of natural history,[134] unnatural histories should make no pretense of authoritative completeness. My telling of one story of 'nature' and 'nation' in south-central Africa has centered on the lands now called Zambia and Zimbabwe surrounding the upper Zambezi river where I spent most of the summer of 2016. By choosing to attend particularly—but again, only partially—to these places, I had to forego deeper research into the history of what are now Angola, Namibia, or Botswana, which also feature in the KAZA TFCA and the last two of which I visited for only a short time. In this chapter, rather than attempting anything like eco-biography, a complete life history of a place and its inhabitants, I have zeroed in on certain moments and personages in the past that might help—and indeed *have helped me*—to make sense of things in the present and for the future, to continually rethink what seems already known.

[133] Raffles 2002; Cruikshank 2005; West 2006; Hughes 2010; Grove 1995; Jacobs 2003; McGregor 2009.
[134] Cf. Ritvo 1997.

3. ON THE ORIGINS OF A *TRANSFRONTIER CONSERVATION AREA*

or, Hidden Fences

The sun was surely shining on that December day in Xai-Xai, 2002. The Mozambican resort town on the sandy coast of the Indian Ocean was host to a meeting of great significance. Present were three heads of state: Joaquim Chissano, who had guided Mozambique out of its long and paralyzing civil war; Robert Mugabe, the Zimbabwean revolutionary turned President turned authoritarian, by then in his third decade of rule; and Thabo Mbeki, the man in the unenviable position of succeeding Nelson Mandela as leader of South Africa's post-apartheid transition. Surrounded, no doubt, by a swarm of functionaries, diplomats, scientists, and philanthropists (including many from the Peace Parks Foundation—more on them below), these three presidents had assembled for that hallowed ceremony of international statecraft, a treaty signing.

More than 300 kilometers due northwest, though, the real spectacle was taking place. While the signatures in Xai-Xai were juridically necessary, the more historically unique, symbolically potent, and politically-ecologically interesting aspect of the establishment of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park was the tearing down of a border fence between South Africa's super-famous Kruger National Park to post-war Mozambique's brand new Limpopo National Park.[135] (My sense is that most every tourist—from anywhere around the world—becomes aware of Kruger NP over the course of planning their trips to southern Africa. Apart from its having a long history and serving as the setting of numerous wildlife media programs, I am not quite sure what explains Kruger's iconic status within the African tourism economy.[136]) If the fence being brought down at all resonated with the global zeitgeist of post-Berlin Wall reunification for some, what happened next was a more particularly southern African phenomenon: the (human-managed) translocation of of 30 elephants from wildlife-abundant Kruger NP into the newly-gazetted Limpopo NP. In the well-spun words of the Peace Parks Foundation, the Transfrontier Park represents a "'dream of an Africa without fences….of ancient [animal] migration trails trodden deep by an instinct that time has never contained.'"[137]

While various kinds of transboundary parks in this multi-imperial turned multinational area of the Limpopo basin had been envisioned by colonial conservationists in 1927, only the changing southern African political realities of the 1990s and 2000s—especially the independence of Namibia, the ending of apartheid in South Africa, and the resolution of the Mozambican civil war—could turn these 'dreams' into realities.[138] This chapter sketches the contemporary re-emergence of transfrontier

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[135] Spierenburg & Wels 2006.

[136] Jane Carruthers' (1995) classic study of Kruger NP's history, too, has helped ensure that most studies of conservation practice—particularly the function of national parks—in southern Africa and other regions of the continent refer to Kruger.

[137] Peace Parks Foundation quote in Wolmer 2003: 264.

[138] Mavhunga & Spierenburg 2009; Büscher 2013.

conservation visions, institutions, and practices in southern Africa and more specifically the development of the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, a story I will continue in the following chapter. While phrases like "Tourism Without Boundaries" are legion in promotional materials for KAZA and other transfrontier parks and transfrontier conservation areas, I map how the apparent erasure of some boundaries has prompted the formation of others. The 'dream of an Africa without fences' has produced a landscape not of fewer, I argue, but better hidden fences.

PEACE PARKS, CAPITALIST CONSERVATION, ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY?

Transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs) are perhaps the dominant large-scale model for environmental conservation in southern Africa and rank high among the region's most studied political-ecological phenomena.[139] The multiple, complex genealogies of TFCAs are embedded within unnatural histories of colonization and conservation, particularly the emergence of national and international conservation regimes, but there is no simple through-line from the earliest colonial visions of transboundary reserves.[140] Most important, according to many influential analysts of TFCAs, especially Bram Büscher, was not colonial infrastructure but neoliberal influence.[141]

The emergence of the doctrine of neoliberalism, as popularly theorized in and beyond the social sciences, is the circa-1980s (unevenly) global transition to a market-based, growth-oriented economic philosophy, diminishing the size and regulatory role of state governments, eliminating barriers to the transnational flow of capital, and privatizing formerly public entities.[142] Environmental conservation, which has typically been managed through state apparatuses, is in the purported 'neoliberal era' increasingly joined with capitalism to together "shap[e] nature and society" anew; indeed, for many political ecologists, it has become "increasingly difficult to determine if we are describing conservation with capitalism as its instrument or capitalism with conservation as its instrument," the two are seen as so closely linked.[143] Transfrontier Conservation Areas formally result from agreements made between multiple nation-states but from then on are managed in public-private partnership, with a large portion of funding coming from various European nations' development arms, regional and global institutions such as the South African Development Community and World Bank, and billionaire philanthropists.[144] Consequently, market logics have helped shape southern Africa's TFCAs, not least because of the South Africa-based Peace Parks Foundation (founded by a white Afrikaner), the primary institutional force behind the recent rise of TFCAs. The PPF counts among its million-dollar sponsors the firms of Cartier, De Beers, Chrysler, and Philips, and one need not have much background knowledge on the ecological consequences of

[139] E.g. Wolmer 2003; Draper, Spierenburg, & Wels 2004; Spierenburg & Wels 2006; Ramutsindela 2007; Metcalfe & Kepe 2008; Lunstrum 2010, 2013.
[140] Mavhunga & Spierenburg 2009.
[141] Büscher 2013.
[142] E.g., Goldman 2005: 8.
[143] Brockington, Duffy, & Igoe 2008: 5-6.
[144] Büscher 2013. The SADC is something I most wish I had more time and know-how to analyze.

modern industry to appreciate the ironies of diamond miners, automobile makers, and oil companies parading as major conservationists.[145]

So closely are capital and ecological interests intertwined that some observes conclude TFCAs exemplify conservation as a "productive process" in its own right.[146] As Büscher has noted, the "coalition of interests, including donors, other NGOs, and—perhaps most important—the regional states whose cooperation was vital to bring transfrontier conservation into being….have ensured that transfrontier conservation has been firmly embedded within regional and global political economies and—crucially—that the dominant postcolonial neoliberal political economy was firmly embedded in the peace park concept."[147] Though the rise of TFCAs has best served the interests of elite (and very often non-African) conservationists and capitalists, southern Africa's TFCAs purport to be resolutely politically neutral, most especially through the conscious designation of "Peace Parks." This name encapsulates what Jim Ferguson has called the politics of "anti-politics"; conservation is widely seen as being apolitical because, to a certain extent, conservationists and their agendas have made it so.[148]

More pertinent but less obvious than the neoliberal influence of the Peace Parks Foundation are TFCA's links to the community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) models popularized in Namibia and Zimbabwe in the 1990s, as I began to recognize in the planning meeting for a new KAZA-funded community conservancy in Zambia.[149] (The recognition was facilitated, too, by the resemblance to an alternate name for TFCA-style conservation: transboundary natural resource management, or TBNRM.) CBNRM models aim to conserve the abundance of these wildlife populations through empowering local communities to materially benefit from a 'sustainable' relationship to wildlife; for instance, one common idea is to have communities formally commodify and thus limit 'hunting' in their territories, from which the financial benefits—the 'development'—would disincentivize illegal forms of hunting.[150] I found this view to be practically ubiquitous among many different types of conservation actors in southern Africa; even with their own recognition that these aims are rarely all achieved, most continue to tacitly support their logic.

Transfrontier conservation has increasingly represented a scaling-up of CBNRM's consciously holistic approach to the issues among "parks, people, and poverty" not so easily sealed off from traditional "fortress" models of conservation.[151] While the earliest transfrontier *parks* like the Great Limpopo—which link multiple state-managed territories through the removal of international but now internal fencing—maintain and sometimes expand the fortress-like external fencing around designated nature enclosures, the more recent transfrontier *conservation areas* like

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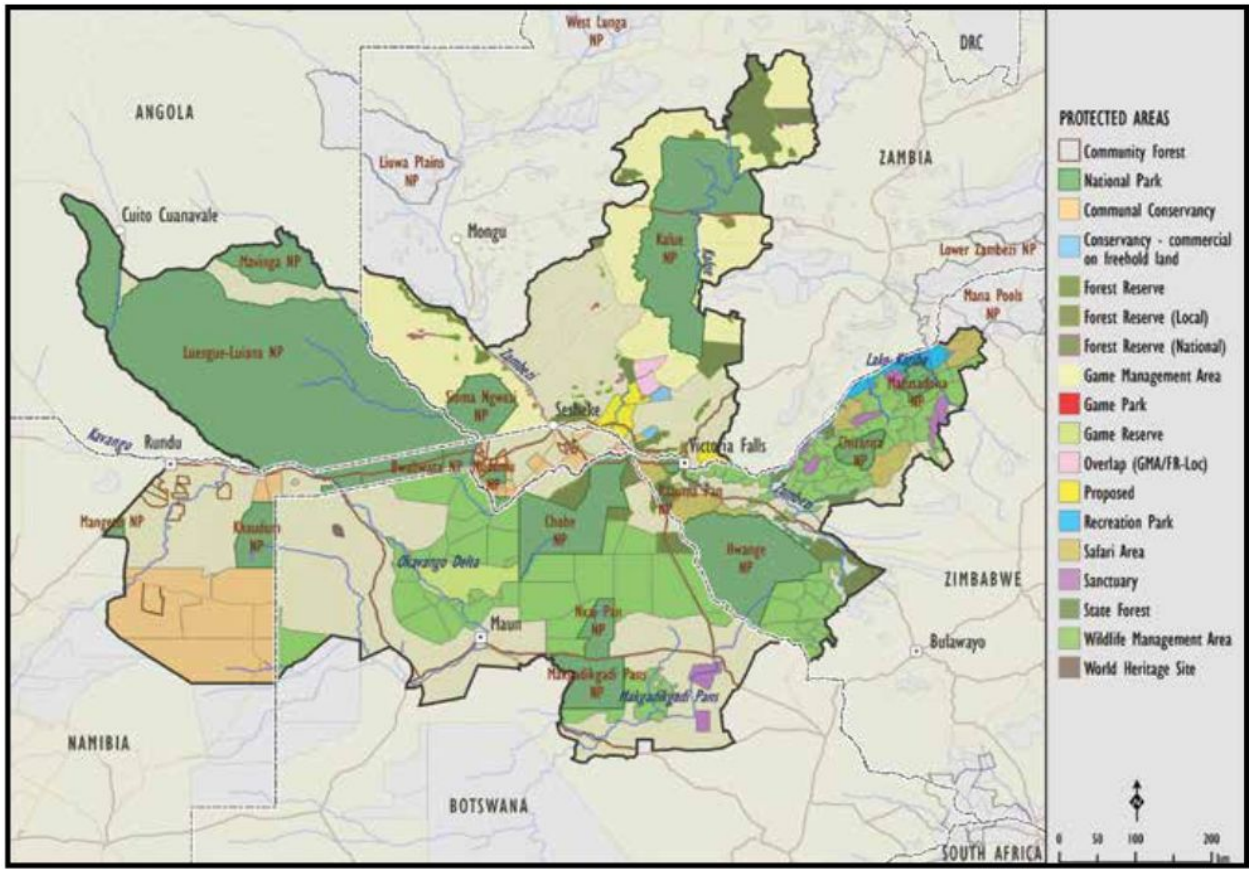
[145] PPF 2010.
[146] Garland 2008: 62.
[147] Büscher 2013: 44-45.
[148] Ferguson 1990; Büscher 2013: 20-21.
[149] Jones 1999; Alexander & McGregor 2000. In particular, Zimbabwe's Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources, or CAMPFIRE, has attracted particular attention across and beyond southern Africa, though one Zimbabwean conservationist I spoke with thought CAMPFIRE had not quite lived up to its radical potential.
[150] Virtanen 2003. Fox & Sneddon 2007.
[151] Adams & Hutton 2007; Brockington 2002.

KAZA, comprise a more diverse mosaic of land-use types, including private property.[152] Most of KAZA's journalistic coverage (or whatever articles in *National Geographic* and like publications should be called) and in-house promoting on its website feature fulsome praise of the interconnectivity, boundlessness, and restoration of natural balance the TFCA, like all TFCAs, widely promotes.[153] Without critical political-ecological eyes, I might nearly have believed the dreams myself. Maps like the one below—featured in the Secretariat's 2015 Master Integrated Development Plan, a technical document described to me in biblical terms—and like the (partial, situated) multispecies ethnographic map I was able to construct through my fieldwork reveal the socio-ecological landscape to be far more complicated. The patchwork geography represented below would be impossible without fences and other forms of boundary-making, no matter how hidden they may be in KAZA's material-semiotic assemblage of transfrontier conservation.



Land-use map (blurry but adequate) of KAZA TFCA from Master Integrated Development Plan, 2015

The map in general and the above map in particular also make clear the importance of scale. Scaling-up is one of the dominant modalities of globalization but also of contemporary environmentalism, as recent proposals to make "Half Earth" free of human interference indicate

[152] Spierenburg & Wels 2006.
[153] E.g. Godwin 2001; Hanks 2007.

clearly enough.[154] Many conservationists, amateur and professional, take for granted the idea that the more land under conservationist governance the better. This kind of scaling-up is epitomized by KAZA—regularly touted as the world's largest conservation zone, larger than any number of entire European nations—and is not without critics; Zimbabwean scholar Vupenyu Dzingirai, for one, has called transfrontier conservation "disenfranchisement at large" for the ways scale is mobilized to render the region's many small-scale human communities marginal.[155]

Yet, what, really, is the right scale for ecologies? And is scale the most important factor for restoring or ensuring 'ecological integrity'?

RETHINKING THE MAKING & MAPPING OF KAZA

In certain respects, there is no such place as 'the Okavango-Zambezi basin'; I made it up.

I have no training in hydrology but this I know: in 'southern Africa' (also made up, but not by me), there is a river called the Okavango and another called the Zambezi, and various other smaller bodies of groundwater flow into them. Hydrologists call this a basin, and since the Okavango does not itself flow into an ocean, hydrologists call this an endorheic basin. It is, however, unlikely that these basins form a single, unified basin that could be called 'the Okavango-Zambezi.'

I would have never thought to link the Okavango and Zambezi basins were it not for the existence of the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area, which was made through a process of intra-/inter-national and intra-/inter-species negotiation, of which a 2006 Memorandum of Understanding and a 2011 Treaty are only two important markers. That is, the KAZA TFCA would and could not exist without the (contestable but nonetheless real) recognition that a single, unified Okavango-Zambezi ecology exists[156]—consider only the first clause of the TFCA's mission: "To sustainably manage the Kavango Zambezi ecosystem,...."[157] For certain conservationists, for certain politicians, and principally, I will argue in the following chapter, for certain elephants (among other nonhuman beings), an Okavango-Zambezi ecology did exist, materially and meaningfully, even before its official recognition at the international treaty-signing in August 2011.

I may have made up the designation of the 'Okavango-Zambezi basin,' but I did so only as shorthand for and in recognition of the other, earlier formal and informal designations of an Okavango-Zambezi ecology and the KAZA TFCA. These accumulating layers of meaning and materiality—imperfect, impure, unnatural, but real—exemplify the remakings and remappings of

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[154] Büscher et al. 2016.

[155] Dzingirai 2004.

[156] The World Wildlife Fund/World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) has a set of biome categories it calls "ecoregions," and while influential enough to appear in the KAZA TFCA's 2015 Master IDP, this is not what I mean here by *ecology* (refer to the Introduction), which in my usage could include multiple such physical "ecoregions."

[157] http://www.kavangozambezi.org/index.php/en/about/about-kaza. "O" is a masculine article in Portuguese, the primary official language of Angola, the site of the river's source. Okavango and Kavango are interchangeable.

time-space that a historical-geographical approach uniquely illuminates.[158] The multispecies nature of meaning and materiality in the Okavango-Zambezi basin-ecology is the focus of the next chapter.

My research on southern African transfrontier conservation began as an effort to disentangle what I suspected were competing ideologies of ecological-scientific conservation, 'neoliberal' capitalist development, and sovereign nation-state governance. During and after my fieldwork, however, I found that I *could not* easily or elegantly disentangle them and, moreover, that doing so *would not* serve my analysis of the KAZA TFCA. The many government bureaucrats, NGO scientists, private businesspeople, lay citizens, and foreign tourists I encountered and conversed with were nothing like embodiments of particular ideological formations; each was simply too complicated for all that. The most interesting element of conservation practice in the Okavango-Zambezi basin, as I partially experienced it, was precisely how entangled ecological, capitalist, and international relations are. Far from suggesting a harmonious nature to these different dimensions of transfrontier conservation, I instead want to stay with the troublesome thoughts that there are multiple, dynamic causes for every one phenomenon and that relations themselves change agents and are agents of change. While I might have argued two years ago that TFCAs epitomized neoliberal and neocolonial patterns in ecological governance, today I say: perhaps, but what else?

More than simply the neoliberal machinations of the Peace Parks Foundation and more than the neocolonial imposition of Euro-American conservation ideals, I believe we must ask what might be discovered by positioning elephants as a "starting point" for understanding the dynamics of transfrontier conservation in the Okavango-Zambezi basin?[159]

[158] Cf. Massey 2005.
[159] Cf. Büscher 2013: 42.

4. ELEPHANT SOVEREIGNTY

Multispecies Politics in Multinational Places

Elephant grazing in Chobe River between Namibia and Botswana—May, 2016

One afternoon in mid-July, I was waiting in proverbial no man's land, no longer in Botswana but not quite in Zimbabwe. Already holding the necessary visa, I passed through both Kazungula customs offices quickly, but the taxi I had booked was delayed coming from Victoria Falls. I waited and stared off into the distance. After a while, I spotted a small herd of elephants, maybe a kilometer from where I stood, ambling across the road and stopping traffic before heading down to the Zambezi river. (Not a surprising sight—in the three months I spent in southern Africa, I surely saw a few hundred pachyderms—but always a special one for me.) I watched this herd cross the river into Zambia and pass out of my view, and there in the stillness of the afternoon, I partly envied them, able to move so freely wherever they pleased. Elephants do not need passports and have little use for border posts.

The observation is hardly an epiphany: of course elephants don't need passports, those are for humans. But my experience participating in and observing the politics of environmental conservation in southern Africa makes me caution against so easily splitting issues into human and nonhuman realms; after all, *entanglement* is a keyword of today's political ecology.[160] Perhaps

[160] Kirksey & Helmreich 2010; Collard 2012; Nading 2013.

nation-states and their boundary security apparatus mean little in explicit terms to elephants, but crossing a river and entering another country can come with different conservation policies, hunting regulations, or fencing infrastructure that have life-or-death consequences for elephants. This is a matter of critical importance to and for Africa's elephants (*Loxodonta africana*), more than 75% of which occupy a transnational habitat according to recent findings in *Biological Conservation*.[161]

Consider what I learned from one conservationist in Zambia, who spoke of the unique scale and geographic density of the elephant population in the Okavango and Zambezi river basins:

> [I]n this area, there are far too many elephants. I mean, they are just destroying the landscape. The land cannot support them, and as elephants are being so dominant, ravaging the ecosystem, that ecosystem is no longer able to support the less dominant herbivore species. And once they start to disappear, your predators who were reliant on them start to disappear and you get a complete breakdown. If you go to Hwange National Park [in Zimbabwe] or you go to Chobe [National Park in Botswana]—if you go to Chobe, I mean, you won't find a tree that hasn't been damaged by an elephant, such is the scale of it. (Interview conducted June 15, 2016)

This region is home to Africa's largest transnational elephant population, more than 200,000 individuals spread across the Okavango and Zambezi hydro-ecological systems.[162] This is not the same story for elephants across the continent, especially in West and East Africa, where ecological opportunities and threats are quite different than they are in the southern African interior. Endangerment and extinction are matters of spatial distribution, politics, and history, as much as of biology.[163] (Scholars of African elephant population genomes have recently made a geographic distinction between savanna and forest African elephant species: *Loxodonta africana* and *Loxodonta cyclotis*, respectively.[164]) The Okavango-Zambezi basin—and particularly near Chobe and Kazungula, the nexus where Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, and Namibia converge, at the core of the KAZA TFCA—is unique, a Motswana conservationist told me, in that elephants can and often do pass through at least four nations in the course of one typical day's travels.

This chapter asks what it means to position elephants as among the political actors causing the establishment of the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area? Further, what does it mean to consider sovereignty, a key political and political-ecological concept, in relation to elephants? The Okavango-Zambezi basin, at least as mapped in the technocratic parameters of the KAZA TFCA, is a multinational place, but the politics it occasions are multispecies. Thus, this chapter is, at last, an attempt to bring together these multispecies and multinational dimensions.

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[161] Lindsay et al. 2017.
[162] Chase et al. 2016.
[163] Choy 2011.
[164] Rohland et al. 2010. Indeed, as Anna Tsing (2015: 8) and matsutake mushrooms have elsewhere taught me, "the dynamics of speciation are still unclear."

ELEPHANTS ARE POLITICAL ACTORS

Elephants are political actors. Joining a new wave of scholarship in animal(s') geographies and multispecies ethnography,[165] reading against the grain of the actor-network theory canon, I position elephants not merely as Latourian "actants"—those nonhumans "'given voice'" by scientific or governmental systems—but full "actors," capable in themselves of generating new actions and reactions by themselves and from others.[166] In fact, a just-published regular paper of the Institute of British Geographers makes the same recognition of elephants in central Kenya; independently drawing on a similar body of scholarship, authors Lauren Evans and Bill Adams note that "Elephants, with their size, sagacity, hunger, mobility, determination and complex interactions with people….are obvious targets for geographers interested in animal agency."[167] Still, the argument for expanding the status of "political actor" beyond the human can be and has been extended far past species like elephants. For one, Jake Fleming, has recently made a compelling call for "vegetal political ecology," insisting that criteria of "mobility" and "intentionality" in determinations of other-than-human "political actors" merely replicate old lacunae.[168] For another, Eduardo Kohn has influentially and convincingly argued that forests, dogs, and other nonhuman beings do "think," if in modes of semiosis and meaning-making beyond natural human capabilities to easily recognize.[169]

Thus, along with a more expansive conception of the political, as I discussed in the Introduction, the political status of elephants depends on a more expansive conception of elephants. (Attentive to the misperceptions of the the blind men in the ancient parable, I aim to balance the poststructuralist sense that an elephant is an assemblage of discursive and material relations with the common sense that an elephant is an elephant is an elephant.) As Fleming holds, the physiological and affective characteristics of elephants and other super-charismatic megafauna—to the extent that they are even *legible* to humans[170]—are not reason enough for considering individuals of these species political actors, but do make ignoring their active role in socioecological relations all the more ludicrous (as too much scholarship on conservation has too long done). The best solution might be to affirm that all nonhuman living beings are differently autonomous.[171] For instance, Juno Parreñas's work on "semi-wild" orangutan rehabilitation in Borneo inspired her to develop a notion of "arrested autonomy" to describe the ways her orangutan research subjects negotiate dependence

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[165] E.g. Wolch & Emel 1998; Hodgetts & Lorimer 2014; Kirksey & Helmreich 2010; Whatmore & Thorne 2000; Barua 2013; Locke 2013, 2017.

[166] Jepson et al. 2011; Goedeke & Rikoon 2008; Latour 1996. See also Donna Haraway (2008: 20-21), a generative interlocutor of Latour's, has compelled me to consider why we should not turn nonhumans into subalterns unable to speak or, at least, to be heard; furthering Derrida, and inspiring Kohn, she makes clear how our multispecies world of engagement and companionship must rest on something other than logocentrism.

[167] Evans & Adams 2018.

[168] Fleming 2017. See also Srinivasan & Kasturirangan 2016.

[169] Kohn 2013. This work is an especially useful corrective to reductive evolutionarism.

[170] Lorimer 2007, 2015. Cf. Scott 1998.

[171] Here I want to keep in mind that autonomy should not suggest isolation or separation from social (i.e. multispecies) entanglements; instead, Haraway's (2008: 164) "autonomy-in-relation" offers a more useful formulation.

and independence with each other and with human conservation actors.[172] These semi-captive, semi-wild orangutans in Malaysia are autonomous—not under the control of "rational" human actors—as are the forests (horticultural and indigenous) in Kyrgyzstan and the Ecuadorian Amazon respectively studied by Fleming and Kohn, as are the "wild" elephants who traverse the rivers of the Okavango-Zambezi basin, though each differently so.

Accordingly, I recognize mobility as an important manifestation—not basis—of elephant autonomy and agency, and one that most clearly illustrates how elephants pose problems to traditional models of environmental governance, particularly what Dan Brockington has influentially dubbed "fortress conservation."[173] Driving through a government-managed forest in southern Zambia one afternoon, I asked a conservationist companion of mine what was the deal with the segments of fencing we would see as our truck passed through. My friend, a young British biologist, told me the fences were supposedly electrified but that she's seen enough knocked down by elephants to doubt whether the power is actually or always on. I have since heard that elephants can sense electricity and will trample the fences when the electrical currents are inactive. The broken fences are material evidence that the ambitions of conservation planners are all too easily ignored by itinerant elephants, who are always crossing boundaries and are never under the complete control of human governance.[174] I propose, then, that these elephants represent a particular type of political actor: the *transboundary subject*.

In 1989, Susan Leigh Star and James L. Griesemer contributed the concept of the "boundary object" to Science & Technology Studies to describe how certain entities can be "both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites….They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation."[175] It is undeniable that the same elephants mean different things to different non-elephants within and beyond the riverine plains of southern Africa: for example, a hungry lioness sees a young elephant as a potential meal, while most (but certainly not all) human tourists see the same calf as the perfect focus of a cute photo, just as a Zambian peasant could see a lone elephant bull as a potential rampaging killer, while a pair of oxpecker birds might primarily see the same bull as a tranquil perch. The mutability of the meaning of elephants to non-elephant others became evident to me in the diverging views of park/wildlife rangers, conservation biologists, operators of tourism and ecotourism ventures, smallholding farmers, commercial hunters and ("reformed") former poachers, government bureaucrats, visiting tourists, and semi-urban artisans I met and conversed with. Not to mention the region's other non-human and non-elephant species, for whom I will not pretend to think or speak but who nonetheless

[172] Parreñas 2012.
[173] Brockington 2002.
[174] Cf. Evans & Adams 2018.
[175] Star & Griesemer 1989: 393.

maintain equally diverging relationships with elephants, from predators like lions to fellow herbivores (competitors?) like buffalo or sable antelopes to symbionts like oxpeckers.

Still, elephant activity is not bound to what humans or antelopes or oxpeckers understand or expect or intend. In this, we may be better off considering elephants subjects than objects.[176] The autonomy of elephants was commonly recognized by my interlocutors in the field; I found it was something of a badge of honor for conservation researchers and tourists alike to bear stories of almost being charged by an elephant while out on a game drive, so long as these humans came back unscathed and able to tell the tale. This mix of awe, excitement, and fear for the power of elephants was conspicuously absent from the perspective of the "local" farmers, who more commonly viewed elephants as nuisances or clear-and-present dangers, imperiling their livelihoods or even lives. One early study of the KAZA TFCA, conducted between the signing of the first memorandum of understanding in 2006 and the official treaty in 2011, is titled "Your Elephant on Our Land," reflecting the views, voiced and unvoiced, of Zambian communities towards wildlife.[177] There was always a great deal of talk from my conservationist companions about how "local" people (somewhat justifiably) hate elephants—often from the direct loss of a family member to a charging elephant, which I know happened more than once during my time in Zambia—even as one of the principal goals of contemporary conservation practice is to *educate* and *sensitize* neighboring communities to the importance of wildlife.

Elephants are autonomous and, in a sense, self-governing, but they are also *subject* in various ways to non-elephant governance, particularly (but perhaps not exclusively) humans' conservation regimes. Here elephants operate as boundary subjects connecting discursive ideas of animal life from "game" to "wildlife" to "biodiversity" to "(natural) resource" to "pest" to "charismatic megafauna" and more, each with its own regime of multispecies relations and practices.[178] Yet, my sense of governance is derived from Foucault, who conceived of power as something pervasive in relationships, not possessed by authorities.[179] In that light it is clear that, in and beyond the Okavango and Zambezi river basins, elephants also play a role in the subjectification of humans, some of whom will be made "environmental subjects," in Arun Agrawal's influential notion, still others made capitalist (perhaps "neoliberal") subjects or statist subjects committed to the expansion of market or state power through new elephant-dependent business ventures or government programs.[180] These new environmental, capitalist, and statist human subjects—sometimes all in one—are themselves constrained by autonomous elephant activity, as I will continue to elaborate.

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[176] In the STS/organizational sociology literature, the "boundary object" has already been modified into "boundary subject" (Huzzard et al. 2010) to consider the agency of "action researchers" in a translating role. Further, Srinivasan (2014) uses the phrase "subject-object" to characterize the (bio)political status of turtle populations in her Foucauldian study of biodiversity conservation in India, but my attention to individual elephants (not only populations) leads me to emphasize the former (see also Hodgetts 2017), despite provocative work (e.g. Bennett 2010) moving far beyond the social lives of "things" (Appadurai 1986) and despite political ecology's intrinsic discomfort with binary oppositions.

[177] Metcalfe & Kepe 2008.

[178] Biermann & Mansfield 2014; Heatherington 2012; Mavhunga 2011; Lorimer 2015.

[179] Foucault 2000.

[180] Agrawal 2005; Büscher 2013.

Though Star and Griesemer conceived of boundary objects as "marginal" to the spheres of scientific practice they studied,[181] elephants in the Okavango-Zambezi basin are not so much "marginal" to human society as transgressive: the common sight of knocked-down fences attests that elephants will not passively be contained by human designs but will instead resist "enclosure."[182] Hence, "*trans*boundary subject" seems the most appropriate adaptation of the Star and Griesemer's idea. Environmental management is having a "*trans*" boom; apart from the southern African phenomenon of "transfrontier conservation," *transboundary* is an even more commonly used phrase in global conservation discourses.[183] Revealingly, one of the most influential conservation NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa is called Elephants Without Borders; the group is based in northeastern Botswana, just outside Chobe National Park, and uses the slogan "Conservation Without Boundaries!"[184] For now, as I have argued in the previous chapter, that motto is only aspirational: conservation practice in the Okavango-Zambezi basin is constructed with and through socio-spatial boundaries that delineate national parks and other protected areas from communal areas under traditional authorities or privately-owned property—boundaries that exist, with material consequences, but which do not constrain the autonomy of elephants.[185] Still, elephants' status as transboundary subjects reveals not merely the transgression of human-upheld borders but also the active reconfiguration and production of new borders (sometimes hidden), key to the making and mapping of transfrontier conservation.

SOVEREIGNTY AND ELEPHANTS

One afternoon in late May, while taking a boat cruise on the Chobe River, I came across the elephant pictured at the opening of this chapter and an unexpected way of thinking through multispecies and multinational politics. Grazing in a shallow, grass-covered stretch of the Chobe as the sun slowly descended beneath the horizon, she or he stood not far from a flagpole, planted in the riverbed but bent by the river breeze. Atop this flagpole was a piece of fabric, dyed light blue but horizontally transected by a thick band of black bordered by two white stripes, the flag of the nation-state of Botswana. (Among the 'fun facts' revealed on the boat trip were two of interest here: first, that the national animal of Botswana is the zebra; second, that this black-and-white symbolism is rich with political meaning, as the country's then-President Ian Khama was the mixed-race son of

[181] Star & Griesemer 1989: 412.
[182] Whatmore & Thorne 1998; Foucault 1995 [1979]. See also Jeffrey et al. 2012.
[183] E.g. Abbott et al. 2007; Fox & Sneddon 2007.
[184] Lindsay et al. 2017; http://elephantswithoutborders.org/. The parallels to the famed humanitarian group Médecins sans Frontières, or Doctors Without Borders, are immediately evident to me but in need of further unpacking.
[185] The question of trophy hunting is one that I do not have space to fully address here, but suffice it to say, hunting represents a sovereign human imposition into elephant life (cf. Foucault 2000), perhaps the exception that suggests the rule of elephant autonomy.

its first President, Seretse Khama, and Ruth Williams, a white, London-born woman.[186]) This elephant so apparently unconcerned with the flag's claim of territorial sovereignty, like those others who traveled so easily without passports before my envious eyes, inspired me to think anew about the ways elephant lifeways in the Okavango-Zambezi basin do and do not conform to human nation-state (and fundamentally post-colonial) mappings of political governance. Before long I began to question whether these elephants might be engaged in their own enactment of sovereignty over territory delineated not by certain humans over history but by themselves, in relation with each other and with the many non-elephant actors of the riverine socio-ecosystem.[187]

Since the mid-20th century decolonial moment, the notion of *sovereignty* in international jurisprudence has typically referred to "the absolute internal authority of political entities and their capacity to secure external recognition by like bodies," notes political theorist Siba N'Zatioula Grovogui.[188] However, I follow geographer Libby Lunstrum's rethinking of sovereignty as a relational, rather than absolute, capacity: that is, "as a set of attributes, competencies, and powers that are actively and routinely produced through a series of unequal interactions and negotiations with other actors, including other state and extra-state actors."[189] Like Lunstrum, who studies Mozambique's participation in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, I recognize that transboundary conservation necessarily entails novel "articulations" of sovereignty, new configurations of governance and state power, but I want to expand her argument to include elephants—from individuals to the regional meta-population—among these actors.[190] There are multiple valences to the idea of "elephant sovereignty" as I want to question it here. First, are elephants producing new articulations of sovereignty on the part of nation-states, the typical contemporary figures of sovereignty? Second, are elephants enacting their own forms of sovereign power vis-à-vis territory and other life forms, including humans, in the Okavango-Zambezi basin?

At the start of this project, before fieldwork, one of my unarticulated suspicions was that the transfrontier model of conservation—apparently suited to the exigencies of neoliberal capital and the interests of the global scientific elite—perhaps exploited and exacerbated the supposed governance weaknesses of southern Africa's postcolonial nation-states.[191] Alternatively, if South Africa and Botswana were truly the political and economic "miracles" of the region and even the continent, as so many analysts have been so quick to proclaim,[192] then perhaps these two states were

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[186] In fact, this interracial love story was recently dramatized in Amma Asante's film *A United Kingdom* (2016). Still, the racial politics of contemporary Botswana have come under some necessary scrutiny of late, as in Catie Gressier's *At Home in the Okavango: White Batswana Narratives of Emplacement & Belonging* (2015).

[187] In line with other scholars committed to challenging political ecology's default anthropocentrism, including Jake Fleming (2017) and others referenced above, I argue we can acknowledge this geopolitical agency without needing to impute any motive or intention to elephant activity.

[188] Grovogui 1996: 1.

[189] Lunstrum 2013: 2.

[190] Lunstrum 2013.

[191] I saw a historical parallel with the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland's transboundary machinations too neat to resist, and I was not yet in pursuit of unnatural history.

[192] E.g., Barber 2000; Harvey 1992.

instituting transfrontier networks to expand power over their depressed, defunct, or war-torn neighbors. These suspicions are emblematic of a certain style of overdetermined social analysis, the kind that finely-tuned ethnographic attention can best ward against. My participant-observation among and interviews with government-based foresters, ecologists, and conservation managers from southern Zambia, northwestern Zimbabwe, and northeastern Botswana made me see otherwise, just as my exposure to more critical modes of scholarship made me see the persistence and virulence of global tropes of African weak states.[193] "[T]hese are all sovereign states, mind you," a management officer attached to the KAZA Secretariat told me after I asked him about the new forms of joint conservation enforcement the TFCA model has encouraged and helped institute. In aim and practice, the international dimension of transfrontier conservation is a relation of collaboration and negotiation, not usurpation, for, as Lunstrum has suggested of post-war Mozambique's role in the GLTP, transfrontier collaborations have seemed to meaningfully strengthen the governing authority of individual nation-states, even ostensibly weaker ones.[194] This is not the neoliberalist expectation.

Sovereignty is regularly on the minds of conservation and other government officials in the Okavango-Zambezi basin and was surely on the minds of those assembled in August 2011 in Luanda, Angola to sign the KAZA treaty on behalf of the five 'partner states.' Indeed, the first stipulation of the treaty's preamble, like that of the MoU, "recogniz[es] the principle of sovereign equality and territorial integrity of their respective States."[195] But I suspect that national sovereignty is rarely, if ever, on the minds of elephants, who might nonetheless enter the territory of multiple nation-states in a single day.[196] Transnational and transboundary elephants challenge the postcolonial state's expectation of 'absolute internal authority' and the ability to regulate and control who comes in and who leaves its territory.[197] I argue that the geographic scale, population scope, and uncontrollable agency of elephant movement forced the states of the Okavango-Zambezi basin into new articulations of sovereignty.

Unlike in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, where the spectacular removal of border fences and initial transmigration of (temporarily "arrested") elephants from South Africa into Mozambique originated from the decisions of certain humans, the elephants of the Okavango-Zambezi basin have actively made corridors for themselves between the region's existing conservation areas. (Yet, perhaps the Limpopo elephants had an unwritten history of boundary-breaking or simply chose not to enter the conflict-ridden landscape of Mozambique, just as Okavango-Zambezi elephants have been recognized by humans as avoiding the conflict-ridden landscape of southeastern Angola.[198]) The "wildlife dispersal areas," one of the primary elements of

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[193] Ferguson 2006; Death 2016.
[194] Lunstrum 2013.
[195] KAZA 2011.
[196] If recognition of sovereignty requires a relationship of "like bodies" (Grovogui 1996: 1; see also Rutherford 2012), there may be multiple impediments at work here.
[197] Cf. Grovogui 1996.
[198] Evans & Adams (2018) provide the best model for how to read elephant agency in poorly-archived multispecies history.

transfrontier conservation, are more-or-less formal remappings of spaces elephants have already made for themselves.[199] Indeed, the 2006 Memorandum of Understanding that set in motion the development of the KAZA TFCA provides that, beyond the already established national parks and game reserves in each partner state, "other land [is] to be determined by migratory wildlife movement," most of all elephants.[200] Elephant agency, however, disappears from most critical analysis of TFCA—as in political scientist Carl Death's brief observation that KAZA's "rationale is to provide the elephants of Chobe and the Okavango parks with access to far larger areas of protected grazing"[201]—and with it a full sense of the political-ecological landscape of the Okavango-Zambezi basin, where autonomous elephants have forced sovereign nation-states new international, intranational, and transnational engagements.

The absoluteness of national sovereignty is far from guaranteed in post-colonial southern Africa—nor in North America and elsewhere around the world[202]—where in some countries, "traditional authorities" maintain key roles within, alongside, and apart from the nation-states, a "flexible" form of sovereignty.[203] At one conservation planning meeting I attended in Zambia, one of the KAZA countries where tribal governance remains strong, enormous respect was paid to a senior chief in attendance, everyone from district politicians and bureaucrats to local lodge-owners to representatives of the Peace Parks Foundation kneeling and bowing each time the chief entered and exited the conference room. While this senior chief is a rung or two lower than his tribe's paramount chief, these men may or may not have the final word on all that can be done in the nominally Zambian territory in their respective domains (the senior chief oversees some 100,000 people, the paramount chief six to ten times that). Experiencing the more complex, relational forms of governance, authority, and sovereignty at work here has inspired me to think through a second dimension of the relationship between elephants and sovereignty—could elephants be exercising their own (flexible) forms of sovereignty?

I ask this not simply to reframe elephant political autonomy and agency, as I have described above, under the sign of sovereignty, a move that surely risks erasing whatever may be conceptually unique about sovereignty.[204] Instead, I want to relate my multispecies (quasi-)ethnographic findings in the Okavango-Zambezi basin with the idea of "wild animal sovereignty" developed by Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka in their provocative 2011 treatise *Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*.[205] Donaldson and Kymlicka's rights-based approach to multispecies encounters occupies

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[199] Lunstrum 2013; KAZA TFCA 2015.
[200] KAZA TFCA 2006.
[201] Death 2016: 128.
[202] Cf. Simpson 2014.
[203] Ferme 2003. See also Mamdani 1996.
[204] Whether our world needs sovereignty or could be better off without it are questions for another thesis (see also Bonilla 2017), but ones related to the concerns of my concluding chapter.
[205] Donaldson & Kymlicka 2011. Of note, *Zoopolis* relates rights to the 'interests' of animal communities, a move explicitly opposed to prevailing 'welfare'-centered traditions of animal rights theory, à la Peter Singer.

moralistic and legalistic terrains I have mostly avoided,[206] as my discussion of sovereignty has emphasized its political dimensions over the ethical and juridical, but I want to visit their thinking precisely because of its differences. Rather than take "sovereignty" as a theory-object in itself, Donaldson and Kymlicka fashion it as a political tool of unnatural origins.

> We first ask….what is the goal of attributing sovereignty? And….we then ask what allocation of sovereignty rights would help achieve that moral purpose. This allocation of sovereignty rights need not track any pre-existing natural communities, but may rather involve constructing new conceptions of community in order to achieve the underlying moral purpose. [207]

This order, Donaldson and Kymlicka suggest, is neither hypothetical nor limited to nonhuman animals, but instead a facet of the human history of sovereignty; the trajectory certainly parallels the typical decolonial experience of sovereignty-seeking and nation-forming in sub-Saharan Africa.[208] Often, they argue, speaking as and of humans, "we [but precisely who?] do not accord sovereignty to pre-existing states; rather, we construct states in order to exercise sovereignty," in order to realize particular political goals—most generally, "protecting certain important interests against certain standard threats."[209] If sovereignty is this kind of tool for Zambians and Zimbabweans—categories of humans that did not exist until decolonization—then why not for elephants?

Indeed, Donaldson and Kymlicka thoroughly consider whether sovereignty could be useful for all "'truly wild' animals, that is, those animals who avoid humans and human settlement, maintaining a separate and independent existence (insofar as they are able to) in their own shrinking habitats or territories," and conclude in the affirmative, proposing a "right of wild animal communities to lead autonomous, self-directed lives" in a territorially-bound habitat.[210] Aware there are no "natural 'communities'" of wild animals, the theorists suggest that "allocating sovereignty to multi-species habitats or eco-regions"—however unnatural—is simply the "best" approach to secure the interests of the diverse species in question, who "are all dependent on the same habitat."[211] There are aspects of Donaldson and Kymlicka's formulation that appeal to my more speculative notions of the ethical and political interests of elephants and other nonhuman animals (which I feel unable and unwilling to elaborate here), aspects that ring true with my ethnographic impressions of the multispecies landscape of the Okavango-Zambezi basin, and aspects that seem mistaken.

The history and geography of the Okavango-Zambezi basin suggest that 'wildness' here, as in legitimate separation from human domains, could only ever be a myth (inaccurate and unfair for some), marketing scheme (profitable for others), or an invitation for massive dispossession and

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[206] Ergo, critical issues of *personhood* and, especially, *citizenship* have gone unaddressed and unarticulated but not entirely unthought.
[207] Donaldson & Kymlicka 2013: 151.
[208] Cooper 2014; Grovogui 1996; Anderson 1983.
[209] Donaldson & Kymlicka 2013: 151
[210] Donaldson & Kymlicka 2011: 156, 205.
[211] Donaldson & Kymlicka 2013: 152.

dislocation (violent for all).[212] Recall that the elephant I photographed was standing not just in front of the Botswana flag but in front of other clear signs of capital-D human development: homes and other buildings, boat docks, radio/cell towers. Some two million humans permanently live within the boundaries of the KAZA TFCA, predominantly in diffuse rural configurations.[213] Across much, if not most, of the Okavango-Zambezi basin, then, it seems unlikely that elephants and humans have ever maintained truly 'separate and independent existences.'

Yet, are the KAZA TFCA's corridors and dispersal areas, collaboratively made and mapped by certain elephants and certain humans, functioning as the territory of "wild animal sovereignty"? Donaldson and Kymlicka help me rethink sovereignty as an unnatural tool for unnatural communities, but at a point, the absolutism of their provocation gets in the way of their theory's own uses. I conclude that elephants in the KAZA TFCA are already exercising sovereignty as part of a larger multispecies, but not simply non-human, constellation of flexible sovereignty.[214] Over time, these elephants—acting autonomously, as individuals, as larger social groups, and in relation with members of other species—have demarcated territory for their living space that, moreover, has been recognized by other species, including notoriously self-centered humans.

"Photographic safari," elephants with human tourist, Zambezi National Park, Zimbabwe—July, 2016

[212] Cf. Adams & McShane 1992; Cronon 1995; Neumann 1998; Brockington, Duffy, & Igoe 2008.
[213] KAZA 2015.
[214] The questions of life and death in human-elephant relations that are occasioned theoretically (by Foucault) and situationally (by hunting, poaching, and stampeding) are of immense importance. I regret that I have not had the space and time to think through them all here, but I do not think this absence undermines the arguments I have presented.

LEARNING FROM ELEPHANTS

"Sovereignty," it seems, is everywhere lately, moving well beyond its traditional place in the juridical realm of international law and the abstract realm of continental philosophy and entering such fields as literary and cultural studies with considerable popularity.[215] This sovereign turn, anthropologist Yarimar Bonilla has recently argued, demands unpacking and, moreover, "unsettling." As the notion of sovereignty has its roots in the settler-colonial practices of empire, Bonilla has proposed *unsettling* (over decolonizing) sovereignty as a way "to trouble its presumptions, question its origins, and explore its alternatives."[216]

This chapter has been an attempt to trouble sovereignty. In an anticolonial ethic, I have refused to reify the Eurocentric genealogy of sovereignty that leads from Westphalia to Manifest Destiny to Carl Schmitt's fascist-friendly definition. More significantly, despite my initial ethical-political hesitations, I have moved my analysis of sovereignty in the Okavango-Zambezi basin from a multinational to a multispecies mode. In the study of transfrontier conservation politics, particularly, elephants force scholars to reckon with more situated and relational specificity if the explanation cannot be just neoliberalism or neocolonialism.

Elephants challenge conventional notions of politics and of political authority, and we humans have much to learn.

[215] E.g. Grovogui 1996; Agamben 1995; Hensley 2016.
[216] Bonilla 2017: 335.

5. CONCLUSION

Think we must. We must think.[217]

— Virginia Woolf, Isabelle Stengers, Vinciane Despret, & Donna Haraway

In this honors thesis, I have attempted to think (and rethink) politics ecologically and ecologies politically, histories geographically and geographies historically. Remapping the relations among humans, animals, plants, and the non-living matter that sustains them in and beyond the Okavango and Zambezi basin, I have thought through the contestations and collaborations these relations sustain, most especially through the practices, knowledges, and institutions of *conservation*. At last, I must think through a final question entangled in all that has come before and all that might yet come of this project: what is the relationship between ecologies, as in thinking disciplines or living spaces, and borders? Can there be—are there already—(political) ecologies without borders? What do borders mean in ecological worlds?

My approach to these questions across this thesis has been multiple, partial, and sometimes contradictory. On one hand, my *unnatural* study of a history of conservation and colonization in the Zambezi basin revealed that the British demarcation of the borders of the different Rhodesian territories was a contingent set of acts to facilitate imperial and settler-colonial governance. On another, this colonial mapping gave fixed shape to what were recognized, or misrecognized, as borders of pre-colonial African societies and borders of the Zambezi material landscape—namely, rivers—for to suggest that southern African political and environmental borders were more shifting, fluid, porous, and contested than British imperial mappers could identify is still to acknowledge the presence of alternative, perhaps illegible borders. Indeed, on an additional hand, in my study of the Transfrontier Conservation phenomenon, the Kavango Zambezi TFCA in particular, and the position of Okavango-Zambezi elephants as *transboundary subjects*—all situated within a popular-scientific discourse rife with ideas and slogans of "**X** without borders" or "**Y** without boundaries"—I have detailed how these socio-spatial practices nevertheless depend on the production of new borders and boundaries.

As Achille Mbembe, one of the most interesting and influential contemporary thinkers from anywhere in the world, has recently observed: "Precolonial Africa might not have been a borderless world. But where they existed, borders were always porous and permeable."[218] Perhaps this—not the presence of borders but their permeability, their type—is the more important dimension for political ecologies. If ecologies can vary in scale from as small as a single cell to as large as a single planet (or larger!), then some kind of border is always operative. Indeed, in the Okavango-Zambezi basin, however conceptually or cartographically bordered this place might be, existing borders are meaningful in some ways and meaningless in others. My research surfaced this issue in

[217] Haraway 2016.
[218] Mbembe 2017b.

thought-provoking ways during an extensive, nearly two-hour conversation I had with a government conservationist in southern Zambia, of which I reproduce an extended excerpt here:

> *One thing that comes to my mind, but also that I've seen in sort of the scholarly takes on these kinds of things, not especially KAZA but other transfrontier conservation areas, is the kind of changes brought to the border, these national borders, and the effects that has on the kinds of human migration that becomes now possible or not. Do you think it's important to think about those issues, and do you see that those issues are being thought about?*
>
> Like people moving from Angola coming to stay in Zambia? You know the funny thing is that when you go to Sioma Ngwezi [NP in southwestern Zambia], the people in Sioma Ngwezi speak Portuguese and the like. They have their uncle in Angola, an aunt in Namibia, the other one in Botswana {*both laugh*} because they are the same people. It's just a line was drawn to differentiate the countries. But they're actually the same people.
>
> *All these years?*
>
> Yes, it's like in Zimbabwe and Zambia, you'll find some names in Zimbabwe which are actually Zambian—and you go, 'Ooh, that's actually my first cousin. Yeah, my mom is here but my dad is, you know….' [....] you find that the culture in this place, you're talking about the same people.
>
> *I guess in the United States, looking over to Africa, a lot of people think why did they, why did all these countries still keep these old borders when the countries are not exactly aligned* (Hmm, yes) *and your cousin is on the other side of the line? I wonder if that's something talked about here, or it's just taken as the normal state of things, that my aunt is over here….*
>
> Yes, you don't even think of the line.
>
> *And it's not a problem?*
>
> No. {*both laugh*} It's not. Strange, huh?
>
> *I'm sure.*
>
> You know, actually, you interviewing, I'm actually thinking of it and thinking 'Wow, Africa could be one village with different states.'
>
> *You think so?*
>
> As just one country with smaller countries in it—because if you really think about it, people in Sioma Ngwezi, these are really Angolans. They're from Northwestern Province. They speak everything. You'll find them actually as—remember that time when we had refugees from Angola, leaving from Angola? You'll find that the

> nephew is a refugee, the grandma is in here. But you know, maybe they haven't met, they've met, but this person knows that I have relations in here. [.....]
>
> *But everything is fine the way it is?*
>
> Yes, it's just that it's a passport that determines who is Zambian, who is Malawian—but now we have dual citizenship, so maybe they can have both from each country {*both laugh*}. I don't know about these guys here in Namibia and Angola, if they can have triple….yeah.
>
> *Very interesting. I don't want to take much more of your time*…(I'm enjoying it.) *Excellent, good, good. But I wonder if you think that KAZA is changing, is reducing, even further reducing, the importance of borders? Or if they just didn't matter in your lifetime?*
>
> Like I said, for me, personally….
>
> *It doesn't matter?*
>
> No. (*Interesting. Hmm.*) Like 'You in here dare not step a foot over here.' Nah. {*both laugh*} (Interview conducted June 16, 2016)

I include these ideas my conservationist companion and I co-produced not because I want to suggest they are representative or completely persuasive but because the exchange summarily reveals how this research has denaturalized my ideas of nature and nation, of politics and ecologies, over more than two years of thinking and rethinking these matters. This conservationist and I did not share the same sense of borders, just as I now have a much different sense than I did then, but this nugget of my ethnographic research usefully reminds me that dialogical thinking—the stuff of good scholarship—must take place beyond and across borders, most especially the border cloistering the world of academic theory and argumentation.

A little more than a year ago, Achille Mbembe (an exceptionally good, border-crossing thinker) publicly called for Africans to "scrap the borders that divide" them, to undo the "enclosure" of nations.[219] Reading Mbembe's proposal in the thick of my research, I immediately, and uncritically, wanted to mobilize his political-economic arguments vis-à-vis the political ecology of the KAZA TFCA. Later, remembering the elephants I observed grazing in the Chobe River, I wondered whether they were already experiencing the passport-free mobility Mbembe was championing and whether their more-than-elephant interests of survival, sociality, and sovereignty would be compromised if his proposal of a borderless Africa fully came to pass. Remembering too the Zambian conservationist planner who lives and works in and with the KAZA TFCA day in and day out, I wondered what she would think if I asked her such a question. Her job is ultimately and intimately concerned with the present and future wellbeing of the ecologies that encompass the

[219] Mbembe 2017b.

southern province of Zambia; even as everything she discussed with me clearly indicated her sense that national borders were effectively meaningless, how could she practically conserve that wellbeing without a bordered sense (proprietarily, provincially, nationally) of what she needed to and could possibly help manage?

In the end, were I to propose anything for others to think—or do (!)—from these years of research I would not champion a notion of ecologies without borders. The point of unnatural history, I argue, is not to demonstrate that the ideas, institutions, and relations of nature, nation, and border do not exist but instead to question how they came to be. The value of transfrontier conservation, I suggest, is not to erase borders but instead to extend collaborations across them. The value of recognizing elephant sovereignty is not to reduce the political authority of nation-states but instead to make all sovereignties more flexible, more attuned to cohabitation and more in need of cooperation. (These lessons, moreover, seem to me the chief benefit of the interdisciplinary mode of scholarship that is political ecology.) As Mbembe elsewhere wrote in 2017, "in the end, it is in the relationship that we maintain with the totality of the living world that the truth of who we are is made visible."[220] I think this is true, and I think a relationship promoting as much flourishing as possible for humans, other animals, plants, and the matter that sustains them is a worthwhile goal. It is a goal as naïve, sentimental, and idealistic as the act of searching for a rainbow has widely come to mean, but rainbows do exist, not least in the basin lands of the Okavango and Zambezi rivers.

"Syuungwe na mutitima," the place of rainbows, as seen from Victoria Falls NP, Zimbabwe—July, 2016

[220] Mbembe 2017a.

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